NATION

Dharavi tense as locals stop BMC from razing mosque

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

OYO buys US hotel chain Motel 6 brand for $525M

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Pant and Gill put India in command with hundreds

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Hours before PM's visit, US talks with pro-Khalistanis

Modi is in US for Quad summit, will also meet Biden for talks

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

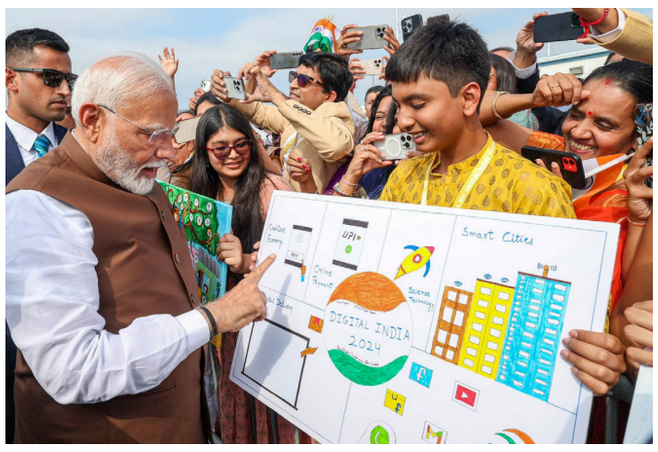
Hours before Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarked on a three-day visit to the United States on Saturday, the White House officials met a group of pro-Khalistan Sikh activists and assured them protection from any transnational aggression on its soil.

This comes amid India's concerns that Canada and the US are giving shelter and asylum to Khalistani separatists.

The meeting was held within the official White House complex and was attended by Pritpal Singh of the American Sikh Caucus Committee and representatives from the Sikh Coalition and Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund (SALDEF).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Quad has emerged as a key platform of like-minded countries focusing on peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Modi will also hold separate bilateral meetings with US President Joe Biden and other world leaders on the margins of the Quad summit in Wilmington, Delaware, and the 'Summit of the Future' at the UN General Assembly in New York.



PM Narendra Modi being welcomed by members of the Indian community upon his arrival at Philadelphia airport, USA, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi's other engagements include joining an Indian diaspora event at Long Island and participating in a roundtable with CEOs of American firms working on cutting-edge technologies such as AI, quantum computing and semiconductors. The annual Quad summit in President Biden's hometown of Wilmington on Saturday is expected to roll a series of new initiatives to boost cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and explore ways to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said on Thursday that there would be a strong focus on peace, progress and stability in the Indo-Pacific at the Quad summit, adding that the leaders will discuss cooperation in areas of health security, climate change, emerging technologies, infrastructure, connectivity and counterterrorism.

From Wilmington, Modi will travel to New York to attend an Indian community event at Long Island on September 22 and address the Summit of the Future at the UN General Assembly the next day.

The 'Summit of the Future' will bring leaders from various countries to forge a new international consensus on how to deliver a "better present and safeguard the future", according to the UN. The QUAD summit plans to expand the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness initiative from South East Asia to the Indian Ocean Region, the White House said on Friday.

The QUAD leadership summit begins Saturday in Wilmington, Delaware, with participation of the four member states -- India, US, Japan, and Australia. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

AAP leader Atishi takes oath as Chief Minister of Delhi during a ceremony at Raj Niwas, in New Delhi, on Saturday, **PHOTO: PTI**

Atishi takes oath as Delhi CM, 5 mins also sworn in

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Senior AAP leader Atishi administered oath as the eighth Chief Minister of Delhi by Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Saturday.

Saxena administered the oath of office and secrecy to Atishi who is now Delhi's third woman chief minister after Congress' Sheila Dikshit and BJP's Sushma Swaraj.

Among her new Council of Ministers, Saurabh Bharadwaj was the first to take oath followed by Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Imran Hussain and Mukesh Ahlawat, a new entrant in the Delhi Cabinet.

Atishi, however, will have a brief tenure in office as Assembly elections are due in February.

The swearing-in ceremony at the Raj Niwas here, which was a low-key affair, was attended by Atishi's predecessor and AAP Convener Arvind Kejriwal, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, and other party leaders and MLAs.

The new Delhi Cabinet headed by Atishi has a long list of pending projects, schemes and new initiatives to be launched in the next few months.

Due to the five-month-long judicial custody of Kejriwal in the excise policy case, the AAP government had been struggling to address issues related to basic services and infrastructure that include roads, water supply and sewer, and medicines owing to alleged fund crunch.

Atishi will have to deal with these issues during her short span of chief ministership, apart from ensuring implementation of Kejriwal's promise to provide Rs 1,000 honorarium to eligible women in Delhi under proposed 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana'.

She will also retain all the 13 portfolios, including education, revenue, finance, power and PWD, that she held in the previous government. The Delhi unit of BJP took a jibe at Atishi, calling her a "remote control and dummy" Chief Minister. *—PTI*

K'taka HC judge apologises for Pakistan remark

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Karnataka High Court Judge Justice Vedavyasachar Srishananda on Saturday expressed regret over his controversial remark referring to a locality in Bengaluru as "Pakistan". Justice Srishananda said his remarks were unintentional and not to hurt any individual or section of the society. This comes after Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of viral video clips showing Justice Srishananda making controversial statements during live-streamed court proceedings. In one of the clips, which surfaced on social media, purportedly showed the judge making a misogynistic comment directed at a female lawyer. *—Agencies*

OTT likely to have 'non-skippable' anti-tobacco ad

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

The Union Health Ministry proposed mandatory display of "non-skippable" anti-tobacco health spots of at least 30 seconds and audio-visual disclaimer on ill-effects of tobacco use for 20 seconds on OTT platforms as soon as one starts streaming them. The Ministry released draft amendments for anti-tobacco rules for over-the-top (OTT) platforms. According to the draft norms, all films of Indian and foreign origin irrespective of their CBFC certification status published and released on or after September 1, 2023 will have to display anti-tobacco health spots of minimum 30 seconds duration each at the beginning and middle of the movie. *—PTI*

CENTRE VS COLLEGIUM

Govt appoints new chief justices to 7 High Courts

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Chief justices were appointed on Saturday in seven high courts, including in Delhi.

The appointments came after the Supreme Court Collegium on Tuesday amended some of its 11 July recommendations.

While Justice Manmohan, acting chief justice of the Delhi High Court, has been appointed as its chief justice, Justice Rajiv Shakdher, a Delhi High Court judge, has been elevated as chief justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court.

Similarly, Justice Nitin Madhukar Jamdar, a Bombay High Court judge, has been appointed as chief justice of the Kerala High Court.

PHOTO: PTI

- Justice Manmohan, acting Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, has been appointed as its Chief Justice. Rajiv Shakdher has been elevated as Chief justice of Himachal HC.

Justice KR Shriram of the Bombay High Court has been made chief justice of the Madras High Court.

Justice Indra Prasanna Mukerji of the Calcutta High Court has been appointed chief justice of the High Court of Meghalaya.

Justice Tashi Rabstan of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court has been made its chief justice.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait of the Delhi High Court has been elevated as chief justice of the High Court of Madhya Pradesh. *—PTI*

LANKA SEES 75% VOTER TURNOUT FOR PREZ POLLS

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

The voter turnout in the Sri Lanka presidential election on Saturday is estimated to be around 75 per cent, according to an official.

Director General Elections Saman Sri Ratnayaka announced that the voter turnout in the presidential election is expected to be 75 per cent, which would be lower than the 83 per cent voter turnout recorded in the previous presidential election held in November 2019.

The polls were held from 7 am to 4 pm local time at over 13,400 polling stations at 22 electoral districts. Over 17 million voters were expected to vote in the election which had the highest number of candidates with 38 in the fray. The counting of votes commenced after the voting closed at 4pm. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

THE ROW DEEPENS

FIR against 7 X users for alleging 'Amul' ghee used in Tirupati laddus

AHMEDABAD, 21 SEPT

PHOTO: PTI

Police on Saturday registered a case against seven users of social media platform 'X' for allegedly spreading misinformation that the "low quality" ghee used for making laddus at the Tirupati temple belonged to the 'Amul' brand, an official said.

A massive political row has erupted after Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu claimed that animal fat was used in making laddus made Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Tirupati during the previous government in the state.

Anand-based Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets its milk and dairy products under the brand name 'Amul', has denied having supplied ghee (clarified butter) to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the temple.

As per the FIR, X users of seven different handles spread misinformation that ghee with animal fat used for preparing laddus for Tirupati Balaji temple belonged to the 'Amul' brand with the intention of harming the reputation of the GCMMF, the cyber crime police station official said. The GCMMF issued a clarification on its X handle 'Amul.coop' on Friday night and said it never supplied Amul ghee to the TTD. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 and 3

KMF using GPS to track ghee supplied to TTD, says official

Karnataka Milk Federation has installed geo-positioning system on its vehicles that supply ghee to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), a top official said on Saturday. KMF managing director MK Jagadish said the Nandini Ghee supply was restored after the TTD awarded a tender to KMF a month ago. Nandini is the popular brand of the Karnataka Milk Federation. "We restored the supply of ghee (to TTD) a month ago. We have installed the GPS system and Geo Location Devices on the vehicles so that we can find out where they stop," Jagadish told PTI. According to him, the KMF got the contract to supply 350 tonnes of ghee. *—PTI*

Docs resume duties partially at state-run WB hospitals

KOLKATA, 21 SEPT

Junior doctors on Saturday rejoined their duties partially at various government-run hospitals in West Bengal after a hiatus of 42 days.

They were on 'cease work' in protest against the rape and murder of an on-duty woman doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

The junior doctors rejoined their duties in essential and emergency services at all state-run hospitals but not in the outpatient departments (OPDs).

"We have started rejoining duties today. Our colleagues have started returning to their respective departments since this morning only in essential and emergency services, but not at the OPDs. Please do not forget that this is only a partial resumption of duties," Aniket Mahato, one of the agitating doctors, told PTI.

He said his other colleagues have already left for flood-hit districts of the state where they would start 'Abhaya clinics' (medical camps), to demonstrate their commitment to public health even amid ongoing protests. Emergency services returned to normalcy at various state-run hospitals, with the doctors rejoining work.

The agitating doctors said that they would wait for another seven days for the administration to fulfill their demands for justice for the deceased doctor and the removal of state health secretary or else they would start another round of 'cease work'.

The doctors have been protesting since 9 August when the body of a woman medic was found at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, demanding justice for the deceased doctor as well as removing key officials from their posts alleging their involvement in the case. *—PTI*

HORROR IN MALLESWARAM

City woman chopped into 30 pieces, stuffed in fridge

The body was found in a single bedroom house **PHOTO: SALAR**

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

A 29-year-old woman's dismembered body was found in a house in Malleswaram here, police sources said on Saturday.

According to police, Mahalakshmi's body, cut into over 30 pieces, was stuffed in a refrigerator. Senior police officers reached the spot and barricaded the road leading to the building where the body was found in a single bedroom house, where the victim was staying alone. Police suspect it to be a case of murder, which took place about a week ago. An investigation has been launched into the case. Additional Commissioner of Police (West Zone) N Satheesh Kumar said, "A woman's body was found chopped into pieces and stored in a fridge at a house within the Vyalikaval police station limits. It appeared to have been done 4-5 days ago." He said the dog squad and the forensic experts too visited the spot and started the investigation.

Mahalakshmi **PHOTO: SALAR**

- The victim was staying alone. Police suspect the murder took place about a week ago.

"The body has been identified. The probe is going on. We will give more information after the investigation. She was settled in Karnataka but is originally from another state," Kumar told reporters.

It is learnt that the woman was living separately from her husband. While Mahalakshmi lived in Malleswaram and was working in a mall, her husband worked in a hermitage away from the City. After learning about the incident, he too came to the spot.

The incident was a stark reminder of the brutal murder of Shraddha Walker by her live-in partner Aftab Poonawalla on 18 May, 2022 at Mehrauli in Delhi.

Twenty-eight-year-old Poonawala allegedly strangled Walkar and sawed her body into 35 pieces which he kept in a 300-litre fridge for almost three weeks at his residence before dumping them across the City. *—PTI*

2 youths injured in clash during idol procession

MYSURU, 21 SEPT

Two youths were injured in a brawl during Ganesha idol immersion procession at Machahalli in Mandya taluk on Friday night. The injured are Nanjundaswamy and Sachin of Machahalli village, according to Mandya rural police. When the duo were dancing during the procession, Darshan and Lokesh of a rival gang attacked them. Sachin suffered stab injuries, while Nanjundaswamy sustained an eye injury. They are undergoing treatment at Mandya Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital. Mandya Rural Police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Mount Carmel students hold dengue awareness

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

A group of students from Mount Carmel College organised a dengue awareness campaign at Venkateshpuram in City, educating the residents about preventing the mosquito-borne disease. Going door to door, the students informed residents about the importance of eliminating mosquito breeding grounds by disposing of stagnant water and maintaining cleanliness in households. The group also stressed the use of mosquito nets and repellents as effective methods to prevent mosquito bites. In addition to preventive measures, the team educated people about the symptoms of dengue, urging them to seek immediate medical attention if they suspected an infection. They also gathered data on the levels of dengue awareness within the community to better understand preparedness in the area. *—Salar News*

Traffic curbs in Panathur due to culvert laying work

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

City traffic police have issued a traffic advisory in view of a culvert-laying work by Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) at Panathur in City. The work will continue until 21 October and cause traffic disruptions in Whitefield traffic police station limits, particularly along Balagere-Panathur Main Road. Vehicular movement from Panathur Road underbridge towards Balagere will be completely restricted. However, traffic from Balagere towards Panathur will operate as one way to facilitate easier movement. Vehicles that are travelling from Panathur RUB towards Balagere, can use Panathur Dinne Road. *—Salar News*

Munirathna sent to judicial custody

SIT to probe cases filed against BJP MLA

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

BJP MLA Munirathna was arrested in a case of rape, sexual harassment and criminal intimidation **PHOTO: PTI**

A special court here on Saturday remanded BJP MLA Munirathna, who was arrested in connection with a case of rape, sexual harassment and criminal intimidation, in 14 days' judicial custody. Munirathna was produced before the court a day after his arrest from where he was sent to the central jail.

State government constituted a Special Investigation Team headed by Additional Director General of Police (CID) BK Singh to probe three criminal cases registered against Munirathna, including a casteist slur and a rape case. The team has been asked to probe not only the three cases against him but also all the cases registered against the MLA and his aides in various police stations across the state. Munirathna was arrested a week ago in two FIRs being lodged against him for alleged harassment, threats and casteist abuse.

Soon after he was released on bail, he was arrested in a rape case and was remanded to judicial custody on Saturday. The cases against the Rajarajeshwarinagar MLA were filed at Vyalikaval police station on 13 September.

In the first FIR filed by the police based on a complaint by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) contractor Cheluvaraju, the MLA is accused of demanding Rs 30 lakh as a bribe and threatening to terminate his contract if he did not pay the money.

The contractor alleged that Munirathna had initially demanded Rs 20 lakh in 2021 for a solid waste disposal contract. However, despite making that payment for getting 10 auto trippers for a waste management contract, he was not sanctioned those vehicles by the civic body.

In the complaint, the contractor further alleged that the MLA did not allow him to execute his work and had even slapped him in September 2023. Cheluvaraju also claimed in the complaint that he contemplated ending his life because of the repeated harassment. The contractor has also released a purported audio recording of a phone conversation between him and Munirathna.

According to the police, the second FIR against the accused MLA was filed on the complaint of a BBMP corporator who alleged that Munirathna had hurled casteist abuse, and insulted his caste and family.

The third case was registered on September 19 against Munirathna and six others following the complaint by a 40-year-old woman who alleged that the rape took place at a private resort within the Kaggalipura police station's jurisdiction. *—PTI*

LAND CASE: BSY APPEARS BEFORE LOKAYUKTA

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Senior BJP leader BS Yediyurappa on Saturday appeared before the Karnataka Lokayukta in connection with the alleged illegal land denotification case.

"The police wing of the Lokayukta had served a notice to Yediyurappa and accordingly, he appeared before the investigation officer. The summons were related to the land denotification," a source in the Lokayukta told PTI.

This comes two days after the ruling Congress in Karnataka asked the Lokayukta to expedite its probe against Yediyurappa and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy in connection with the alleged denotification of land here. Ministers Krishna Byre Gowda, Dinesh Gundu Rao and Santhosh released documents regarding the denotification of 1.11 acres at Gangenahalli in Bengaluru North.

This land was acquired by the Bangalore Development Authority to form a layout in 1976, and after denotification, the ministers said the land was registered in the name of Kumaraswamy's brother-in-law Channappa in 2010. *—PTI*

BS Yediyurappa **PHOTO: PTI**

'SCRAP QUOTA'

BJP files complaint against Rahul over his remarks in USA

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

State BJP leaders filed a complaint against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi over his remarks in USA over SC, ST and OBC communities, at High Ground police station in Bengaluru.

The State unit accused Gandhi of making divisive and provocative remarks targeting the SC, ST and OBC communities, endangering India's internal security, sovereignty, unity and integrity. The State unit also sought an investigation into the statements and legal action for the same. Earlier this month, Gandhi, while interacting with students and faculty at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, said Congress will think of scrapping reservations when India becomes a 'fair place'. Dalits, Adivasis and OBC communities are still not getting participation in the system and India is not a 'fair place', Gandhi said.

He also reiterated the need to conduct a caste census while saying 90 per cent of the country's population are not getting proper representation in the country as there is an "elephant in the room". *—ANI*

CREATE AWARENESS ABOUT RARE DISEASES, SAYS CJI CHANDRACHUD

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Saturday emphasised on the need to create awareness about rare diseases among the society, on being empathetic and supportive to such parents and their families regardless of cultural, religious or traditional barriers. He said: "We can no longer afford to be unaware of genetic diseases." Citing National Policy of Rare Diseases launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in March 2021, he said further research is necessary to define the definition of rare diseases. *—PTI*

STATE CRACKS WHIP

Fake news will affect democracy, Constitution: CM

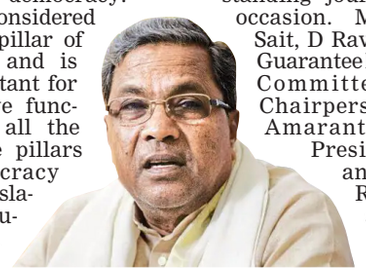
MYSURU, 21 SEPT

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday cautioned that fake news will affect the Constitution, threaten democracy, and disturb peace and social harmony.

People should neither spread fake news nor post it on social media, Siddaramaiah said during an award distribution organised by Mysuru District Journalists Association (MDJA) in Mysuru city.

State government had launched fact-check and cyber-wing units in police stations to rein in people spreading fake news and the culprits won't be spared, the Chief Minister said.

The Congress leader said freedom of speech and expression guaranteed to all citizens in the Constitution is the essence of democracy. Media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy and is most important for the effective functioning of all the other three pillars of democracy such as legislature, executive and judiciary.



People should neither spread fake news nor post it on social media. State government had launched fact-check and cyber-wing units in police stations to rein in people spreading fake news

-Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Media persons play a crucial role in safeguarding democracy; if the media is threatened, then the threat to democracy is imminent. Former prime minister Jawaharalal Nehru always advocated free hand for media, he said. Siddaramaiah also urged the media to be more sensitive towards the real problems of society.

District Minister HC Mahadevappa honoured outstanding journalists on the occasion. MLAs Tanveer Sait, D Ravishankar, State Guarantee Implementation Committee Vice Chairperson Pushpa Amaranth, MDJA President Deepak, and journalists Ravindra Bhat and Ravikumar were present. *—Salar News*

Yelahanka Gas Power Plant to be launched on 24 Sept

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate State's first gas-based cycle power plant of 370MW capacity at Yelahanka here on Tueday.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Yelahanka MKA SR Vishwanath Constituency and others will attend, a statement by Energy Minister KJ George said.

Established by Karnataka Power Corporation Ltd (KPCL), the plant will generate 236.825MW through a gas turbine generator and 133.225MW through a steam turbine generator, totalling 370.05MW. The combined cycle pilot production has been completed.

The foundation stone for the plant was laid by Siddaramaiah in 2016, Energy Minister George said. "This is an important project for our government and KPCL. It is a matter of pride that a government organisation produces gas-based electricity for the first time in the State."

The plant will generate 236.825MW through a gas turbine generator and 133.225MW through a steam turbine generator **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

At a curtain raiser event, Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta highlighted the strides made under the Congress government in expanding energy capacity of the State. "The previous administration did not establish any new gas plants in the State. However, with the focused efforts of our Energy Minister and KPCL, we are excited to announce the addition of a new gas plant to our energy portfolio. This development enhances reliability and improves our ability to manage power supply effectively," he said. *—Salar News*

MIN SERVES LUNCH FOR HANDLERS OF ELEPHANTS

MYSURU, 21 SEPT

Mysuru district in-charge minister HC Mahadevappa on Saturday served lunch for mahouts, kavadis and other elephant handlers, and their family members on Mysuru Palace premises.

Later, the minister inaugurated a temporary tent school that was opened for children of mahouts and kavadis. The minister also launched Dasara website (www.mysoredasara.gov.in) designed by district administration and released Yuva Sambrama posters. Yuva Sambrama, which will be held between 24 and 30 September, is organised for college students and youths. *—Salar News*

Will take Tirupati issue to logical end: Pralhad Joshi

HUBBALLI, 21 SEPT

Union Minister for Food and Consumer Affairs Pralhad Joshi on Saturday said Centre has taken the issue of desecration of Tirupati Laddu seriously and will take the matter to its logical end. The minister also said the allegations cropped up after Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) stopped using Nandini Ghee of Karnataka Milk Federation. "We have heard a serious allegation of adulteration in Tirupati Laddu. The previous (Andhra Pradesh) government was using Nandini Ghee. Once they stopped using Nandini products, they started procuring ghee from different sources. Since then, these incidents have taken place and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has released the lab report as well," Joshi, who also holds public distribution portfolio, said here in Hubballi.

He said the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister is an important politician of India and a good administrator and there must be facts when he has said so. "Now that the lab report has come out, a detailed investigation has to take place. Whoever has committed wrong should be punished," Joshi said. "This is a question of the culture and faith of the country. Such betrayal is not good."

Meanwhile, former deputy chief Minister of Karnataka KS Eshwarappa alleged the role of foreign Christian missionaries during the tenure of former Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy as chief minister. *—PTI*

EDUCATORS ARE KEY IN NATION'S HEALTHCARE: MIN

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Medical educators play a crucial role in moulding the future of healthcare professionals, said Dr Sharan Prakash Patil, Minister for Medical Education and Skill Development.

"Medical education demands not only the transmission of complex knowledge but also the mentorship of students in clinical skills, ethical practices and compassionate patient care," said during Teachers' Day celebration at Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS) here on Saturday. He highlighted the deep commitment required to educate and inspire future doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals.

Patil lauded RGUHS for its contributions to the medical field and for producing world-class healthcare professionals. "At Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, our mission is to cultivate knowledge, compassion, and excellence in healthcare education. This mission is upheld daily by our dedicated teachers who inspire generations of students to strive for greatness," he added.

During the event, Professor Emeritus Awards were conferred on educators including Dr KV Ashok Kumar, Dr AR Raghupathy, Dr Sadashiva Shetty, Dr Ashalata and Dr SK Tiwari. Several other teachers were also felicitated for their contributions to health sciences. *—Salar News*

Sharan Prakash **PHOTO: SALAR**

The elephants run amok on the palace premises triggering panic among the public **PHOTO: PTI**

2 Dasara jumbos clash at Mysuru Palace premises

MYSURU, 21 SEPT

Tension prevailed for some time at Mysuru Palace's Jayamarthanda Gate on Friday evening as two Dasara elephants were engaged in a fight.

The elephants, Dhananjaya and Kanjan, run amok on the palace premises triggering panic among the public. Dhananjaya was brought under control by its mahouts and kavadis. Kanjan, who ran up to Bengaluru-Nilgiris road, stopped on its own and mahouts brought it back to the camp.

Mysuru district in-charge minister HC Mahadevappa said he has asked the foresters and police to ensure that such incidents do not repeat. However, he said animal behaviour cannot be guessed. Like two bulls fighting in open streets, these jumbos also had fights on palace premises where they were camping, Mahadevappa said.

The minister has asked the Forest Department on this. Meanwhile, DCF (wildlife) IB Prabhugowda said Dhananjaya and Kanjan are not in musth and veterinarians have examined the elephants. *—Salar News*

TRACK THE STRAYS

Microchip implantation in dogs kicks off

BENGALURU, 21 SEPT

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) launched a pilot programme on Saturday to implant microchips in stray dogs. The initiative, spearheaded by Special Commissioner of Health and Animal Husbandry Suralkar Vikas Kishore, is being implemented in the Mathikere and Malleswaram areas of the City's western zone. The initiative aims to track and manage the street dog population using advanced technology.

Microchips, roughly the size of a grain of rice, are being inserted under the dogs' skin to serve as a permanent identification method. "This technology will store crucial information such as the dog's place of staying, vaccination history, and neutering status. By eliminating the need for temporary colour codes, which can fade quickly, microchips offer a more reliable and efficient way to track and manage stray dogs," stated Kishore.

Microchips are inserted under dogs' skin **PHOTO: PTI**

BBMP plans to complement the microchipping program with an integrated vaccination initiative. This will help prevent repeated vaccinations and streamline the overall management of stray dogs across the City. The corporation is collaborating with BIZ ORBIT, a organisation, to implement the microchipping. If the pilot programme is successful, BBMP intends to expand the microchipping initiative to all areas under its jurisdiction. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

Air Marshal Amar Singh appointed as next IAF chief

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Air Marshal Amar Preet Singh, who has more than 5,000 hours of flying experience, is set be the next chief of the Indian Air Force, succeeding Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari. Singh, currently serving as the Vice Chief of Air Staff, will take charge of the force on the afternoon of September 30, the defence ministry said.

"The government has appointed Air Marshal Amar Preet Singh, PVSM, AVSM, presently serving as Vice Chief of the Air Staff, as the next Chief of the Air Staff, in the rank of Air Chief Marshal, with effect from the afternoon of September 30," it said. Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari will retire from service on 30 September. Born on 27 October, 1964, Air Marshal Singh was commissioned into the fighter pilot stream of the Indian Air Force in December 1984. As a test pilot, he led the MiG-29 upgrade project management team in Moscow. He was also the project director (flight test) at the National Flight Test Centre and was tasked with flight testing of the light combat aircraft, Tejas. *—PTI*

Cabinet under CM Atishi faces critical projects

Atishi allocates portfolios, retains 13 depts

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

The new Delhi Cabinet headed by Chief Minister Atishi, who took the oath of office on Saturday, has a long list of pending projects, schemes and new initiatives to be launched in the next few months, ahead of Assembly polls due early next year.

Atishi will have to hit the ground running to accelerate the city government's functioning and ensure that the flagship projects and schemes are back on track after those slowed down for months due to the imprisonment of her predecessor, Arvind Kejriwal.

Due to the five-month-long judicial custody of Kejriwal in the excise policy case, AAP government has been struggling to address issues related to basic services and infrastructure, including roads, water supply and sewer and medicines, owing to a fund crunch, as claimed by party leaders.

The immediate task before her will be allocating portfolios among the ministers in consultation with the party, holding the crucial National Capital Civil Services Authority meeting for Group-A postings, resuming the doorstep delivery of services scheme, approving the Delhi EV Policy 2.0 and the Solar Policy, among others, officials said.

Atishi takes oath as Chief Minister of Delhi during a ceremony at Raj Niwas, in New Delhi on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

The new chief minister will also be involved in meetings to speed up the pending work on welfare schemes and infrastructure projects related to roads, water supply, sewerage, pollution, disbursal of subsidies and wage revision of workers in the unorganised sector.

The most daunting task before Atishi, however, will be to establish healthy relations with Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena in view of the latter's approvals required for a variety of governance as well as development work of the Delhi government, the officials said.

Projects and schemes, such as mohalla clinics and premium buses, inauguration of hospitals, schools and flyovers, and new initiatives could materialise in the coming weeks with the new chief minister taking charge, they added. After being chosen as Kejriwal's replacement, Atishi had said her two goals in the next few months would include protecting the interests of Delhiites against BJP's alleged attempts to stall the schemes of providing free electricity, water, healthcare, education, bus rides for women, pilgrimage for the elderly. *—PTI*

'Modi & US' event to feature 2 stages and 400 artistes

NEW YORK, 21 SEPT

Preparations are in full swing for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's event in New York on Sunday, where he will interact with Indian diaspora.

The mega-event titled 'Modi & US', which will be held at Nassau Veterans Coliseum in Uniondale, is already sold out. More than 25,000 attendees had registered for the 13,000 available seats.

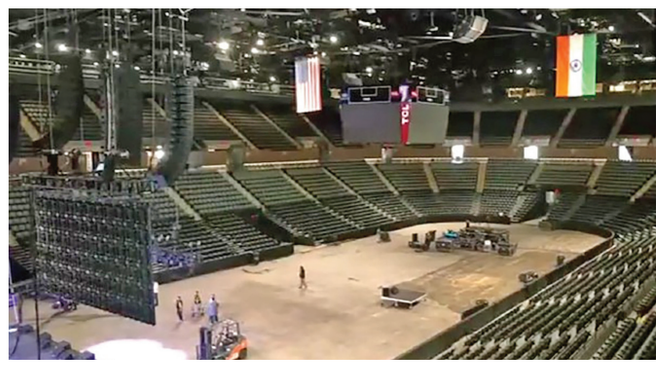
The event garnered more than 500 community organisations from over 40 states joining as 'Welcome Partners' within the first 48 hours of the registration opening.

Modi departed for a three-day visit to the United States on Saturday morning. Leading up to Indian Prime Minister's keynote address, the Modi & US event will feature two stages this year, according to a report by ANI.

The main stage, themed 'Echoes of India: A Journey of Art and Tradition' will feature around 400 nationally and internationally known artists.

The artists include Grammy award nominee Chandrika Tandon; STAR Voice of India winner and Indian superstar Aishwarya Majumdar; Instagram's Dancing Dad Ricky Pond; and singing sensation Rex DSouuza. The outer stage will showcase community-led performances by 100 performers – from classical to folk, fusion to funky.

Sai Sagar Patnaik, the director of the cultural show, said programme is a celebration of India's diversity. *—Agencies*



The event garnered more than 500 community organisations from over 40 states PHOTO: ANI

My mom's home smaller than your limo, Modi told Obama

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

During his visit to the US in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with former US President Barack Obama visited Martin Luther King Jr Memorial. When they were on the way to the memorial in Obama's limousine, in a friendly exchange Obama asked about Modi's mother. Modi replied, "President Obama, you might not believe this, but the size of your car is almost the size of the house my mother lives in!" Vinay Kwatra, current Indian Ambassador to the US shared this story with "Modi Story" website. *—ANI*

India to get 3,000T of hilsa fish from Bangladesh

DHAKA, 21 SEPT

Bangladesh's interim government on Saturday said it would export 3,000 tonnes of hilsa fish to India, coinciding with the upcoming Durga Puja, revising its earlier decision. Durga puja will be celebrated from October 9 to 13. The development comes days after the interim government, led by Professor Muhammad Yunus, earlier this month imposed a ban on hilsa export to India to meet domestic demand, discontinuing a long-standing tradition of Bangladesh as a "goodwill gesture" to its neighbour. "Against the backdrop of appeals by the exporters, approval has been given to export 3,000 tonnes of hilsa fish, fulfilling the specific conditions on the occasion of the upcoming Durga Puja," the commerce ministry said. *—PTI*

'NCP office in Parl complex for Sharad Pawar group'

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Amid controversy over the allocation of a room in the Parliament House complex to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, Lok Sabha Secretariat has clarified that it was meant for the faction headed by Sharad Pawar. On September 11, the Estate and Heritage Management branch of the Lok Sabha Secretariat came out with a list of smaller parties allocated rooms in Parliament House and Samvidhan Sadan -- the old Parliament building. According to the list, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was allotted room 126-D in Samvidhan Sadan. Since the Sharad Pawar-led NCP has more members of Parliament than the "real" NCP, the room allocation triggered a controversy in poll-bound Maharashtra. *—PTI*

Mockery of public accountability: Cong slams SEBI

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Congress has slammed SEBI's refusal to disclose instances when its chairperson Madhabi Buch recused herself due to conflict of interest and said that this makes a "mockery" of public accountability and transparency. The cases where Buch recused herself due to potential conflict of interest is not "readily" available and collating them would "disproportionately divert" its resources, the securities market regulator said in an RTI response on Friday. In the response furnished to transparency activist Commodore Lokesh Batra (retd), the regulator also refused to provide copies of Buch's declarations to the government and SEBI Board. *—PTI*

Borders peaceful as Pak fears PM: Shah

MENDHAR, 21 SEPT

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said there is peace along the borders in Jammu and Kashmir as Pakistan fears Prime Minister Narendra Modi and would not dare to open fire knowing fully that India's response will be befitting to silence its guns.

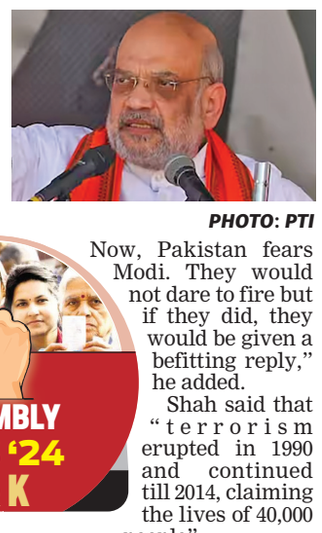


PHOTO: PTI

Addressing an election rally in this border area in the Union territory's Poonch district in support of BJP candidate Murtaza Khan, Shah said the Centre wiped out terrorism by replacing guns and stones in the hands of youngsters with laptops and added the government would not allow guns to resonate in the hills of Jammu region.

"We will construct more bunkers along the borders for the safety of people. I want to remind you of cross-border firings in the 1990s... Is cross-border firing happening today? Now, Pakistan fears Modi. They would not dare to fire but if they did, they would be given a befitting reply," he added.

Shah said that "terrorism erupted in 1990 and continued till 2014, claiming the lives of 40,000 people".

Shah claimed that National Conference vice President Omar Abdullah is frightening people about revival of terrorism. Accusing the National Conference, Congress and PDP of encouraging terrorism, the senior BJP leader said this election will ensure an end to the three families rule in the Union Territory. *—PTI*

AP ISSUES NOTICE TO LEADER WHO BACKED OMAR

SRINAGAR, 21 SEPT

Apni Party on Saturday ordered its chief spokesperson Muntazir Mohiuddin to show cause after he announced support for National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah in the Budgam assembly segment.

Mohiuddin has been asked to clarify his remarks before the party leadership within 48 hours, "failing which disciplinary action will be taken". Mohiuddin has announced his support for Abdullah, who is contesting the assembly polls from Budgam.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister is also contesting from the Ganderbal seat. *—PTI*

Muntazir Mohiuddin PHOTO: X

From kingmaker to king, JJP's Dushyant sets eyes on bigger goal

CHANDIGARH, 21 SEPT

JJP leader Dushyant Chautala, whose party is contesting the 5 October Haryana Assembly polls jointly with Azad Samaj Party, predicts a hung Assembly but exudes confidence that their alliance will win enough seats to emerge as a key player after the results.

JJP had won 10 of the 90 Assembly seats in the 2019 Haryana Assembly polls, BJP 40 and Congress 31.

Chautala, 36, the great grandson of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal, predicts that no single party will be able to cross the 40-seat mark in the elections. Whether they will support any other outfit in case of a hung Assembly, former deputy chief minister Chautala said, "Why to go behind somebody. Why can't somebody come behind us. Anybody can form a good alliance in which we lead." Chautala is up against former Union minister Birender Singh's son Brijendra Singh, a Congress leader.

BJP's Deepak Hooda, ex-Kabaddi team captain in multi-cornered fight from Meham

- Former Indian kabaddi team captain and BJP nominee Hooda is locked in a multi-cornered electoral contest from Jat-dominated Meham Assembly constituency in Rohtak district

He is known for tackling his opponents in kabaddi matches, but this time Deepak Hooda is taking on his rivals in a different contest. Former Indian kabaddi team captain and BJP nominee Hooda is locked in a multi-cornered electoral contest from Jat-dominated Meham Assembly constituency in Rohtak district.

The Meham constituency was once considered the stronghold of ex-PM Chaudhary Devi Lal. He became a legislator from here in 1982, 1985 and 1987.

Thereafter, Congress' Anand Singh Dangi was elected MLA in 1991, 2005, 2009 and 2014. In the 2019 Assembly polls, Dangi was defeated by independent Balraj Kundu.

BJP's Hooda is pitted against Congress candidate Balram Dangi and sitting MLA Balraj Kundu, who formed Haryana Jansewak Party. *—PTI*

Dushyant Chautala PHOTO: PTI

BJP spreading lies, desperate to silence me: Rahul

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Accusing BJP of spreading lies about his recent remarks in the US, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday asked Sikhs whether there was anything wrong in what he had said and if India shouldn't be a country where every Indian could practise their religion without fear.

The former Congress chief said the BJP was desperate to silence him because they could not stand the truth. "BJP has been spreading lies about my remarks in America. I want to ask every Sikh brother and sister in India and abroad- is there anything wrong in what I have said? Shouldn't India be a country where every Sikh- and every Indian- can freely practise their religion without fear?" Gandhi said in a post on X.

Gandhi also shared a short clip of his remarks in the US that shows him referring to a Sikh man. His remarks came after the BJP on Saturday cited a joint statement of several Sikh groups to ask him to withdraw his statement, which it alleged had created an atmosphere of fear in the country.

BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa told reporters several Sikh and gurdwara management bodies had met Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai over the issue and that he asserted the sacrifices of the Sikhs had made the country strong.

BJP cited a joint statement of several Sikh groups to ask Gandhi to withdraw his statement, which has allegedly created an atmosphere of fear in the country. *—PTI*

EY staff death: RaGa speaks to kin

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday spoke with the parents of Anna Sebastian Perayil, who died due to alleged extreme work pressure at Ernst & Young, and assured them that he will fight for the cause of improving working conditions for the millions of professionals in India. Gandhi spoke with the parents of Anna Sebastian via a video call arranged by the Chairman of All India Professionals' Congress (AIPC) Praveen Chakravarty who visited their home in Kochi. andhi also instructed the AIPC Chairman to create an awareness movement in Anna's memory for all working professionals in India. Perayil was a 26-year-old chartered accountant who died allegedly due to extreme work pressure at the firm. *—PTI*

ADULTERATION ROW

Laddu row: Naidu to consult pontiffs, experts on next step

AMARAVATI, 21 SEPT

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said the government will consult pontiffs, sages, priests and other top Hinduism experts on the future course of action to be taken following allegations of animal fat adulteration in Tirupati laddus.

During a recent NDA legislative party meeting, Naidu claimed that the previous YSRCP government did not even spare Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple and used substandard ingredients and animal fat for making the popular Tirupati laddus, known for its unique taste.

The chief minister said after consultation, the government will take its decision with respect to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the official custodian of world-renowned Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Tirupati. *—PTI*

> **To address issues arising out of #TirupatiPrasadam we must ensure at all public places where #Prasadam is distributed @ fssaiindia set up food testing labs to ensure food distribution is in line with expectations, conforms to desired quality.**
>
> -Suresh Prabhu, Former Union Minister

One nation, one election 'dangerous': Kamal Haasan

CHENNAI, 21 SEPT

One nation, one election proposal is 'dangerous', flawed and its scars still exist in some countries and hence it is not needed for India and it will not be required in future too, top actor and Makkal Needhi Maiam founder leader Kamal Haasan said here on Saturday.

Without naming any party or leader, Haasan said had simultaneous polls been held in 2014 or 2015, it would have led to a complete sweep, resulting in dictatorship, loss of freedom of speech and dominance of a single leader.

"You should understand that we have escaped from it...we have escaped from a disease more virulent than Coronavirus," he said.

1 nation, 1 election is governance-friendly: Goa CM

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has termed as "historic" the Union cabinet's approval of the 'one nation, one election' proposal, and claimed that the move will be cost-effective and governance-friendly.

BJP trying to continue its dominance: T'gana CM

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy alleged that BJP is trying to continue its dominance with this initiative which should be repelled.*—PTI*

EXAM IN JHARKHAND

BJP flays internet ban, but Assam CM lauds it

RANCHI, 21 SEPT

Opposition BJP in Jharkhand has termed State government order to suspend mobile internet services for five hours on Saturday and Sunday in view of a competitive exam as another "decree" to hide its "failed" system. However, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said the Jharkhand government has "learnt" from the northeastern state the idea of suspending internet during recruitment examinations.

The suspension of mobile internet from 8am to 1.30pm is a bid to check any malpractice during Jharkhand General Graduate Level Combined Competitive Examination, a notification said.

"When the Jharkhand government could not create a foolproof system to prevent malpractice in the examination, they shut down internet for 3.5 crore people in the entire state," BJP spokesperson Pratul Shadeo said.

Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth also criticised the move to suspend mobile internet services, asserting that it will cause a lot of inconvenience for people. "The directive shows the failure of the Jharkhand government to check unfair means in examinations," the BJP leader said.

Himanta Biswa Sarma PHOTO: PTI

Assam CM Sarma said: "Congress has been criticising me for suspending internet during conduct of examinations. But their government in Jharkhand is doing the same," Sarma said in Kamrup district. "They have learnt from us. And it means that Assam is showing the path to the country now," the BJP leader, who is the party's co-in charge for Jharkhand, said. The Assam government had ordered suspension of mobile internet services across the state for three-and-half hours from 10am on 15 September during a written examination for recruitment to Grade III posts. *—PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Actor Parvin Dabas in ICU after car accident

MUMBAI, 21 SEPT

Actor Parvin Dabas was on Saturday admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of a suburban hospital here after a car accident, his family said. Dabas, 50, has appeared predominantly in Hindi and English language films such as Mira Nair's 'Monsoon Wedding', 'Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara', 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', 'The Perfect Husband' and 'The World Unseen'. His wife, actor Preeti Jhingiani, said that Dabas, the co-founder of arm-wrestling competition Pro Panja League, is recuperating in Holy Family Hospital in Bandra. The Delhi-born actor most recently starred in 'Made in Heaven' season two and Tahira Kashyap's 'Sharmajee Ki Beti'. *—PTI*

Female student of NIT Patna found dead in hostel

PATNA, 21 SEPT

A female student of the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Patna was found hanging from the ceiling fan inside her hostel room on the campus located in Bihta on the outskirts of the Bihar capital, police said on Saturday. The woman hails from Andhra Pradesh and a suicide note was also found at the spot. As the news of the student's death spread, a large number of students of the institute gathered outside the campus and raised slogans against the institute's administration. *—PTI*

Kedarnath yatra put on hold after trek route caves in

RUDRAPRAYAG, 21 SEPT

The pilgrimage to Kedarnath by road was put on hold on Saturday after part of the trek route to the Himalayan temple caved in near Jungle Chatti. Pilgrims returning from Kedarnath as well as those leaving for the temple from Gaurikund and Sonprayag were stopped after 10-15m stretch of the road was damaged, Rudraprayag Superintendent of Police Akshay Prahlad Konde said. Movement along the route will be resumed after the damaged portion of the road is repaired, he said. Meanwhile, an alternative route is also being readied to bring down the pilgrims stranded on their way back from Kedarnath and those waiting in Gaurikunad and Sonprayag to visit the temple. Keeping in mind safety of the pilgrims going on foot to Kedarnath, the police have requested them to stay wherever they are and not rush to reach Sonprayag or Gaurikund where there are limited facilities. Pilgrimage to the temple by air continues uninterrupted. *—PTI*

Tribals protest in Thane, Palghar over basic amenities

THANE, 21 SEPT

Several hundred tribals continued their indefinite stir in front of Thane collectorate on the second day on Saturday. Traffic restrictions have been put in place and a pandal has been erected to accommodate the protesters, who are cooking meals, singing traditional songs and sloganeering at the site, an official said. Similar protests are also underway in Palghar, Nashik and Raigad districts, he added. Despite several government resolutions and promises, crucial issues related to employment, water supply, land rights and basic health services continue to remain unsolved, the protesters said. The Forest Rights Act 2006 has not been implemented properly, they added. "If our demands are not met soon, we will start protesting at the panchayat samiti offices from 23 September," Shramjivi Sanghatana president Rambhau Warna said. *—PTI*

Dharavi tense as locals stop BMC from razing mosque

Hundreds assembled outside Dharavi lane to protest the razing

MUMBAI, 21 SEPT

Tension prevailed in Dharavi slum colony on Saturday morning after hundreds of residents blocked a road to oppose the Mumbai civic body's plan to demolish an alleged illegal portion of a mosque, an official said.

Some residents stopped civic officials from entering the lane where the mosque is located and soon hundreds of people assembled outside the Dharavi police station and squatted on the road.

As the situation became tense, trustees of the mosque held talks with officials of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). They sought four to five days to remove the encroached portion, which was agreed upon by authorities.

Additional police personnel were deployed in the area to prevent any untoward incident, a police official said.

People gather as BMC plans to demolish the illegal portion of a mosque, at Dharavi in Mumbai, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

"A team of BMC officials from G-North administrative ward reached the 90 Feet Road around 9 am to demolish the alleged illegal portion of Mehboob-E-Subhani masjid. Soon, residents gathered at the spot and stopped the civic officials from entering the lane where the mosque is located," he said.

"Later, hundreds of people also assembled outside the Dharavi police station and squatted on the road to protest against the civic body's move," he said.

A civic official said the BMC's G north ward had issued a notice to remove the encroached portion of the mosque and said the action would be taken according to this notice.

Dharavi, a densely-populated colony, is considered the largest slum sprawl in the country.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray accused the Eknath Shinde-led government of trying to create a communal discord as a "last ditch" attempt before upcoming assembly elections.

"The masjid issue in Dharavi is the last attempt by BJP and Shinde government to create discord between Hindus and Muslims. People of Dharavi had stood against the redevelopment project," he said.

BJP and its NDA allies are attempting to stoke communal and caste flare-ups, he alleged. *—PTI*

PROTEST AGAINST TREATY

Normal life hit in Imphal due to 18-hour bandh

IMPHAL, 21 SEPT

Normal life was affected in the Imphal Valley districts of Manipur due to an 18-hour bandh called by a militant outfit, officials said.

Markets, business establishments and banks across the five valley districts remained closed and public transport vehicles were off the roads as National Revolutionary Front of Manipur (NRFM) called for a bandh from Saturday midnight. Essential services were exempted from the purview of the bandh. Normal life in the hill districts, was, however, not affected, an official told PTI. The bandh call was given by NRFM in protest against the signing of the merger agreement between the then Manipur ruler Maharaja Bodhchandra and the Government of India Union of India on 15 October, 1949.

Improvised rocket head, shell found in Manipur

Improvised rocket head ammunition and shell have been found in Manipur's Churachandpur district during search operations, a police statement said on Saturday.

An improvised rocket shell, three live rocket head ammunition of different sizes, three improvised mortars and anti-riot stun shells each and one stun grenade were seized during a search operation and area domination exercise at Samulamlan on Friday, it said.

More than 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May last year. —PTI

Assam girl on way home gangraped

NAGAON, 21 SEPT

- The victim was returning home with her younger brother when she was accosted by the two men, who were known to her and from the same village. They forcibly took her away on a motorcycle and raped her a short distance away.

A 17-year-old girl was abducted and raped by two men in the Dhing area of Nagaon district on Thursday, marking the second such incident in the region within a month.

The victim, who resides on in Sandbar, was returning home with her younger brother when she was accosted by the two men, who were known to her and from the same village.

They forcibly took her away on a motorcycle and raped her a short distance away.

The two men allegedly took turns to rape the girl. Once they were done, they left her at the spot.

The girl reached home and informed her parents, who immediately filed a police complaint. The victim was sent for medical examination and placed in a women's shelter.

Police have launched a manhunt for the suspects, identified as Ishrafil Hussain and Fuzail Ahmed. This incident comes on the heels of another rape case involving a 14-year-old girl in the same area in August. The victim was abducted by three men and raped, leading to widespread protests across the state. One of the accused in that case, Tafazul Islam, died while attempting to escape from police custody. The other two accused, Faridul Islam and Gulap Uddin, are currently in judicial custody. *—PTI*

Defamation case: You can't be touchy in politics, says SC

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

You cannot be "touchy" in politics, Supreme Court observed while hearing Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan's plea relating to a criminal defamation proceeding initiated against him.

Murugan approached the apex court last year, challenging a 5 September, 2023, Madras High Court order in which it had refused to quash the proceeding against him on a complaint filed by Chennai-based Murasoli Trust for his alleged defamatory statements during a December 2020 press conference.

While agreeing to hear his petition on 25 September last year, the top court stayed the proceeding against Murugan that was pending in a special court in Chennai.

The apex court had also sought the Trust's response on his plea challenging the high court order.

The top court stayed the proceeding against Union Minister L Murugan that was pending in a special court in Chennai *PHOTO: PTI*

When the matter came up for hearing before a bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice KV Viswanathan on Friday, the counsel appearing for Murugan said, "Where is the question of defamation in this case?"

The lawyer appearing for the Trust sought an adjournment in the matter.

Murugan had earlier approached the High Court, challenging the proceeding initiated against him.

High Court had noted in its order that according to the Trust, Murugan made the statements "with an ulterior motive to degrade and tarnish the reputation of the Murasoli Trust".

"While dealing with the quash petition, this court cannot go into the merits of the case or the disputed questions of fact. This court has to merely go by what is alleged in the complaint and prima facie find out as to whether the offence is made out," the high court had said.

- "While dismissing the petition, the High Court had directed the trial court to dispose of the case within three months.

"In an offence of defamation, the statements have to be tested only from the point of view of a common prudent man, who comes across the defamatory statements made," it had said.

While dismissing the petition, the High Court had directed the trial court to dispose of the case within three months. *—PTI*

Rly track tampered in Surat, sabotage alleged

SURAT, 21 SEPT

Unidentified people allegedly tampered with a railway track by removing fish plates and loosening several bolts in an attempt to derail trains in Gujarat's Surat district on Saturday, police said.

The sabotage attempt came to light before a train could pass through the affected track between Kosamba and Kim railway stations as a lineman detected the damage and alerted the railway authorities in the early hours of the day, officials said.

Two fish plates that bolted the ends of two rails on the railway track were removed and placed them on the parallel track, Superintendent of Police, Surat (rural), Hitesh Joysar said.

They also loosened some 40-50 bolts, he said.

Deputy Superintendent of Police RR Sarvaiya said a lineman inspecting the track discovered the tampering around 5.30 am and alerted the railway administration.

PHOTO: PTI

This incident follows a series of similar attempts to sabotage train operations in recent times. On 10 September, miscreants attempted to derail a train in Rajasthan's Ajmer by placing two cement blocks, each weighing around 100 kg, on the railway tracks between Saradhana and Bangadh. One of the blocks was hit by a goods train but no major damage was sustained. *—PTI*

IN UN, INDIA CALLS FOR GLOBAL SHIFT TO SUSTAINABILITY

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Adopting sustainable lifestyles could tackle many of the challenges posed by climate change and global success is more likely if affordable solutions are offered, India has said at the United Nations "Summit of the Future".

Addressing the summit in New York on Friday, Leela Nandan, Secretary in the Union environment ministry, also said that climate change discussions often focus solely on emission reductions, but "we are more likely to succeed if we offer affordable solutions, not simply impose decisions".

Citing an estimate by the International Energy Agency, Nandan said, "If we were to put our actions into the right context in terms of saving energy, saving water, reducing waste, reducing e-waste, adopting sustainable food systems, we would have reduced annual global emissions by 2 billion tons by 2030." *—PTI*

KOLKATA FLOODED

Boys play in a waterlogged street after the water level of River Hooghly rises near Kalighat's Kali temple area, in Kolkata on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

IN SOLIDARITY WITH TEACHERS

TISS students allege police action amid protest

MUMBAI, 21 SEPT

Students of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) alleged police action when they protested during a convocation ceremony on its campus here against the suspension of PhD scholar Ramadas Prini Sivanandan.

The students also protested on Friday in solidarity with 119 teachers and staff "who may lose their jobs by 31 December or have already lost," said a statement signed by Sara Bardhan, silver medallist, MA in Urban Policy and Governance, Sreyas Valsan, MA in Urban Policy and Governance, and others.

They alleged that even though the protest was carried out peacefully without disrupting any other proceedings, the administration repeatedly discouraged students from exercising their right to free speech and many police personnel were called to the venue of the convocation ceremony.

The police allegedly kept a student in custody, away from the Convocation Hall till the ceremony ended *PHOTO: PTI*

When Arghya Das, graduating student of MA in Women's Studies, was registering his protest by raising a placard seeking revocation of Sivanandan's suspension and job security for teachers and staff, he was forcibly taken off the stage by guards and police, they claimed.

- In April, the TISS suspended Sivanandan for two years for allegedly indulging in activities which are "not in the interest of the nation" and referred to instances like him participating in a protest.

The police kept Das in custody away from the Convocation Hall till the ceremony ended and all degree certificates were taken away, the students alleged.

In April, the TISS suspended Sivanandan for two years for allegedly indulging in activities which are "not in the interest of the nation" and referred to instances like him participating in a protest in Delhi under the PSF-TISS banner. *—PTI*

PMLA rules on bail cannot stand in way of rights: HC

MUMBAI, 21 SEPT

Stringent conditions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act can not override the fundamental right to liberty under Article 21, the Bombay High Court has said while granting bail to a 72-year-old man.

The trial in the case of alleged bank fraud, for which applicant Suryaji Jadhav was arrested, was not likely to conclude any time soon and he was suffering from cancer, Justice Madhav Jamdar noted in his order of 19 September.

The copy of the judgement became available on Saturday.

Restrictions imposed by laws such as the PMLA "melt down" where an accused has suffered long incarceration and the trial is inordinately delayed, the judge said.

"Despite the restrictive statutory provisions like section 45 of the PMLA, the right of an accused under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution cannot be allowed to be infringed," Justice Jamdar held.

Under section 45 of the PMLA, a court, while granting bail to an accused in a money laundering case, must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe that he is not guilty, and/or is above 60 years of age, or a woman or is sick or infirm.

Article 21 protects the fundamental right to life and personal liberty. Jadhav was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for alleged fraud at the Pune-based Shivajirao Bhosale Sahakari Bank in March 2021. He and others were accused of misappropriating funds and fraudulent disbursal of loans.

Jadhav had sought bail on the grounds of long incarceration and delayed trial.

The court noted that more than 250 witnesses were proposed to be examined by the prosecution, and the trial was yet to start. Jadhav had completed more than half of the maximum punishment he could get in the case, the court said. *—PTI*

PAINTED DOGS, NOT PANDAS

A zoo in China found itself in hot water after it was revealed that its "pandas" were actually painted dogs. The revelation came to light after visitors at the Shanwei zoo noticed one of the animals panting and barking. Outraged visitors took to social media to share photos and videos of the imposters, which went viral. In one video, a dog can be seen panting while lying on a rock, while another is shown strolling around with a long, curly tail. The zoo officials attempted to cover up the deception by claiming that the animals were a rare breed of "panda dogs" ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

Kashmiris are voting again but do they have a voice?

The Tao cafe in Srinagar, capital of Kashmir, is a bustling place. At outdoor tables shaded by majestic trees, Himalayan trout is served with loaves of fresh bread to the young, affluent Kashmiris who frequent it.

But when conversation turns to politics, a hush falls, even though it's an election season. People describe a loss of direction, a drift into an unsettled future.

They are not sure what place mostly Muslim Kashmir has in an increasingly Hindu-nationalist India. They see themselves as caught between India and Pakistan, the two powers still bitterly at odds over the region. They feel trapped in cycles of oppression by India's government and violent resistance to that authority.

On Wednesday, people began voting in the first election for Kashmir's regional legislature in a decade. The vote will restore a degree of self-rule five years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government stripped Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status and brought it more tightly under Delhi's control.

But many young Kashmiris say the return of democracy is partial at best. They say the ballot will not fully restore their voices, taken away by what they call India's criminalisation of dissent and freedom of expression in Kashmir.

"Should we accept our fate or just wait for the situation to change? I am confused," Idrees Ahmad, 33, told friends at the cafe. It was a markedly resigned statement for a young man who, 14 years earlier, had joined a bloody civilian uprising after a Srinagar teenager was struck and killed by a tear-gas canister.

During the decades when India was trying to crush a Pakistan-backed militancy and fully assimilate Kashmir, many young Kashmiris found solace in two things. One was street protests and other forms of public expression; the other, participation in local democratic politics.

Even as tens of thousands died in fighting between separatist insurgents and Indian security forces, a culture of free speech — graffiti, gatherings in public parks, discussions in cafes like Tao — provided many with a sense of nonviolent release for their rage and confusion.

Many young Kashmiris say the return of democracy is partial at best. They say the ballot will not fully restore their voices ***PHOTO: PTI***

No matter how dynastic and self-serving the political parties were, participating in the process gave Kashmiris some semblance of ownership, even if it all played out in the shadow of the military presence.

The worst of the violence has subsided in recent years. But a chill has fallen over the region. Bringing Kashmir under New Delhi's direct rule in 2019 ushered in what local leaders called an occupation administered mostly by outsiders. Even Kashmiri politicians who had fought against the separatists were put under house arrest in large numbers. Rights groups, journalists and civil society have been cowed, with any questioning of the legitimacy of New Delhi's rule essentially outlawed. Many Kashmiri dissidents still languish in jails in faraway cities.

At a corner table at the Tao, most of a group of eight young Kashmiris said their identity and dignity were under threat. They spoke of feeling suffocated and uncertain about the future.

Siddiq Wahid, a professor of international relations at Shiv Nadar University near New Delhi, said the government was not solely to blame for that sense of alienation.

The Kashmiri leaders who spearheaded the long struggle for self-rule lacked a clear strategy, he said. While most Kashmiris wanted an independent homeland, separatists were divided over whether to seek independence, integration into Pakistan or more autonomy within India.

"You can fight a state, you can resist a state, but you can't play a zero-sum game, because you don't stand a chance," Wahid said. The election — a multistage process whose results will be announced on 8 October— is being held against the backdrop of a slowly changing political landscape. Modi's BJP, has been working for years to secure a foothold in Kashmir. In villages and towns, many young Muslim men have joined its ranks, believing that as governing party it can bring more development. But they often wear masks while campaigning for BJP, fearing retribution.

During a speech this week in Jammu, Modi said his policies had indeed led to more investment and infrastructure development. "In the last 10 years, the change witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir is nothing short of a dream come true," he said. "The stone which used to be thrown at police and the army is now being utilized for building a new Jammu and Kashmir."

On a recent afternoon, about 30 miles south of Srinagar, Abrar Rashid, 26, was being carried on the shoulders of young supporters. In June, his father, widely known as Engineer Rashid, won a seat in Parliament despite being imprisoned. His son led his campaign. "We are Kashmiris first, and we have to fight to preserve our identity," said Rashid, whose father was jailed years ago on charges of funding terrorism. Just a few years ago, some of these same supporters were using stones and their own bodies to try to stop soldiers from killing militants. Now, they were celebrating the elevation of a Kashmiri leader in the national legislature of India, a country whose elections many people in Kashmir boycotted for decades.

Shahid Reyaz Thoker, a political activist, shouted slogans and danced on a pickup truck as he campaigned for a candidate from PDP.

When he was a teenager, Thoker was detained by the police and sent to a juvenile home. Officers told his father he had participated in protests over the killings of militants and was preparing to join the insurgency. "What does a 20-year-old want?" Thoker asked, as a loudspeaker blared slogans of self-rule. "A mobile phone, a few friends, a good number of Instagram followers and some pocket money."

"But I want nothing of that sort," he added, "just peace, and peace with dignity."

At the Tao cafe, a group of teenage girls, some wearing Kashmiri-embroidered silk salwar kameez, giggled as they took selfies in front of flower beds. An irritated waiter served them fried vegetable pakora.

One girl said she hoped to become a physician, another a fashion designer. They were holding tight to those aspirations, despite what they described as the childhood trauma of the military presence. "These children have dreams; they need a stable environment to achieve them," said Ruhani Syed, an artist at another table. *—Courtesy, The New York Time*

SALAR

Covid's new variant XEC puts the world on edge

A new Covid variant is spreading rapidly and could soon become the dominant variant around the globe. The variant, called XEC, was first detected in Germany in August and appears to have a growth advantage over other circulating variants – but it is not a radically different variant.

XEC is what's known as a "recombinant variant". Recombinants can occur naturally when a person is simultaneously infected with two different Covid variants.

XEC is the product of a recombination (exchanged pieces of genetic material between two variants) between the KS.1.1 variant and the KP.3.3 variant. These two parent variants are closely related, having both evolved from JN.1, which was the dominant variant around the world at the start of 2024.

XEC was first reported in early August 2024 in Germany and a few other European countries but has since continued to spread, with over 600 cases identified in 27 countries across Europe, North America and Asia.

Scientists identify XEC cases using a public database called Gisaid, to which genetic sequences of viruses are uploaded for analysis. It is here that mutations in SARS-CoV-2 are spotted (SARS-CoV-2 being the virus that causes Covid).

But it's a bit like a drunk looking for his lost keys under the street lamp because that's where the light is best. In other words, more cases of new variants are spotted in those countries that typically sequence more Covid samples through routine surveillance programmes.

Countries with the highest number of identified XEC cases as of September 18 are the US (118), Germany (92), UK (82), Canada (77) and Denmark (61). Of course, these numbers could be higher in countries that don't routinely sequence Covid samples.

Currently, the dominant variant in Europe and North America is KP.3.1.1, while the closely related KP.3.3 dominates in Asia.

XEC is a minority variant and its prevalence is highest in Germany, where around 13 per cent of sequences are potentially XEC. In the UK, prevalence is around 7 per cent, while in the US it is below 5 per cent. However, XEC appears to have a growth advantage and is spreading faster than other circulating variants, suggesting it will become the dominant variant globally in the next few months.

XEC has very similar genetic material to both its parent variants as well other circulating variants, which are mostly derived from JN.1. One reason for XEC's advantage could be the relatively rare T22N mutation (inherited from KS.1.1) combined with Q493E (from KP.3.3) in the spike protein.

The spike protein is a critical part of the virus that binds to human cells, enabling the virus to gain entry and start replicating.

However, little is known about the effects of the T22N mutation on how well the virus can replicate or spread between people.

But does it cause worse disease?

We don't have data yet from patients or laboratory experiments to tell us what kind of illness XEC is likely to cause – although this data is expected soon. However, this new variant will probably be similar to other Covid variants in terms of the disease caused, given its similar genetic information. So, symptoms such as a high temperature, sore throat with a cough, headaches and body aches along with tiredness are to be expected.

Hospitalisations usually increase in winter as a consequence of colder temperatures and increased spreading of viruses (due to people being indoors more). So, these increases, when they come should not necessarily be associated with the new variant.

The campaign for autumn booster in the UK will start in October with an updated vaccine targeting the JN.1 variant, which XEC derives from, assuring a good level of protection against severe illness.

XEC is the latest in a long list of past and current Covid variants being monitored as the virus naturally evolves. Recombinant variants themselves are nothing new, as Covid cases in 2023 were dominated by the XBB recombinant variant.

Several other closely related variants are being monitored, such as the MV.1 variant, which like XEC also has the T22N mutation in the spike protein. MV.1 was originally reported in India in late June and has also spread rapidly to other countries, making it one to monitor in the future.

XEC may well become the dominant global variant, but it could be outcompeted before then or replaced quickly afterwards by a different but closely related variant. *—The Conversation*

Several other closely related variants are being monitored, such as the MV.1 variant, which like XEC also has the T22N mutation in the spike protein ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS

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The invisible threat: Microplastics found in human bodies, food

It's been 20 years since a paper in the journal Science showed the environmental accumulation of tiny plastic fragments and fibres. It named the particles "microplastics".

The paper opened an entire research field. Since then, more than 7,000 published studies have shown the prevalence of microplastics in the environment, in wildlife and in the human body.

So, what have we learned? In a paper released today, an international group of experts, including myself, summarise the current state of knowledge.

In short, microplastics are widespread, accumulating in the remotest parts of our planet. There is evidence of their toxic effects at every level of biological organisation, from tiny insects at the bottom of the food chain to apex predators.

Microplastics are pervasive in food and drink and have been detected throughout the human body. Evidence of their harmful effects is emerging.

The scientific evidence is now more than sufficient: collective global action is urgently needed to tackle microplastics – and the problem has never been more pressing.

Tiny particles, huge problem

Microplastics are generally accepted as plastic particles 5mm or less in one dimension. Some microplastics are intentionally added to products, such as microbeads in facial soaps.

Others are produced unintentionally when bigger plastic items break down – for example, fibres released when you wash a polyester fleece jacket.

Studies have identified some of the main sources of microplastics as: cosmetic cleansers, synthetic textiles, vehicle tyres, plastic-coated fertilisers, plastic film used as mulch in agriculture, fishing rope and netting, crumb rubber infill used in artificial turf and plastics recycling.

Science hasn't yet determined the rate at which larger plastics break down into microplastics. They are also still researching how quickly microplastics become "nanoplastics" – even smaller particles invisible to the eye.

Measuring the microplastic scourge

It's difficult to assess the volume of microplastics in the air, soil and water. But researchers have attempted it.

For example, a 2020 study estimated between 0.8 and three million tonnes of microplastics enter Earth's oceans in a year.

And a recent report suggests leakage into the environment on land could be three to ten times greater than that to oceans. If correct, it means between ten and 40 million tonnes in total.

Science has not yet determined the rate at which larger plastics break down into microplastics ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

The news gets worse. By 2040, microplastic releases to the environment could more than double. Even if humans stopped the flow of microplastics into the environment, the breakdown of bigger plastics would continue.

Microplastics have been detected in more than 1,300 animal species, including fish, mammals, birds and insects.

Some animals mistake the particles for food and ingest it, leading to harm such as blocked intestines. Animals are also harmed when the plastics inside them release the chemicals they contain – or those hitch-hiking on them.

Invaders in our bodies

Microplastics have been identified in the water we drink, the air we breathe and the food we eat – including seafood, table salt, honey, sugar, beer and tea.

Sometimes the contamination occurs in the environment. Other times it's the result of food processing, packaging and handling.

More data is needed on microplastics in human foods such as land-animal products, cereals, grains, fruits, vegetables, beverages, spices, and oils and fats. The concentrations of microplastics in foods vary widely – which means exposure levels in humans around the world also varies. However, some estimates, such as humans ingesting a credit card's worth of plastic every week, are gross overstatements.

As equipment has advanced, scientists have identified smaller particles. They've found microplastics in our lungs, livers, kidneys, blood and reproductive organs. Microplastics have crossed protective barriers into our brains and hearts.While we eliminate some microplastics through urine, faeces and our lungs, many persist in our bodies for a long time.

So what effect does this have on the health of humans and other organisms? Over the years, scientists have changed the way they measure this.

They initially used high doses of microplastics in laboratory tests. Now they use a more realistic dose that better represents what we and other creatures are actually exposed to. And the nature of microplastics differ. For example, they contain different chemicals and interact differently with liquids or sunlight. And species of organisms, including humans, themselves vary between individuals.

This complicates scientists' ability to conclusively link microplastics exposure with effects. In regards to humans, progress is being made. In coming years, expect greater clarity about effects on our bodies such as: inflammation, oxidative stress (an imbalance of free radicals and antioxidants that damages cells), immune responses, genotoxicity – damage to the genetic information in a cell that causes mutations, which can lead to cancer.

What can we do?

Public concern about microplastics is growing. This is compounded by our likely long-term exposure, given microplastics are almost impossible to remove from the environment. Microplastic pollution is the result of human actions and decisions. We created the problem – and now we must create the solution. Some countries have implemented laws regulating microplastics. But this is insufficient to address the challenge. That's where a new legally binding agreement, the UN's Global Plastics Treaty, offers an important opportunity. The fifth round of negotiations begins in November.

The treaty aims to reduce global production of plastics. But the deal must also include measures to reduce microplastics specifically.

Ultimately, plastics must be redesigned to prevent microplastics being released. And individuals and communities must be brought on board, to drive support for government policies. *—The Conversation*

NZ pilot freed after 19 months from West Papua

JAKARTA, 21 SEPT

The New Zealand pilot who's been held hostage for more than a year in the restive Papua region has been freed by separatist rebels, Indonesian authorities said Saturday. Philip Mark Mehrtens, the pilot from Christchurch who was working for Indonesian aviation company Susi Air, was handed over early Saturday to the Cartenz Peace Taskforce, the joint security force set up by the Indonesian government to deal with separatist groups in Papua, after separatist rebels let him walk free early Saturday, said the taskforce spokesperson Bayu Suseno. "We managed to pick him up in good health," Suseno said, adding that Mehrtens was flown to the mining town Timika for further health examination. *—AP*

Iceland: Police shoot 1st polar bear sighted in years

ICELAND, 21 SEPT

A rare polar bear that was spotted in a remote village in Iceland was shot by police after being considered a threat, authorities have said. The bear was killed in the north-west tip of the country after police consulted the national environment agency, which declined to have the animal relocated, according to the Westfjords police chief, Helgi Jensson. "It's not something we like to do," Jensson said. "In this case ... the bear was very close to a summer house. There was an old woman in there." The owner, who was alone, was frightened and locked herself upstairs as the bear rummaged through her garbage, Jensson said. She contacted her daughter in Reykjavik, the capital, by satellite link, and called for help. Polar bears are not native to Iceland but occasionally come ashore after travelling on ice floes from Greenland, according to Anna Sveinsdóttir, the director of scientific collections at the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. Many icebergs have been spotted off the north coast in the last few weeks. *—The Guardian*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

'Peppa Pig' voice actor Graham passes away

WASHINGTON, 21 SEPT

Celebrated voice actor David Graham has passed away at the age of 99, leaving behind a remarkable legacy in the world of animation and entertainment. Graham is best known for his role as Grandpa Pig on the beloved animated series 'Peppa Pig', where he lent his voice from 2004 until 2021. He also brought to life the character Aloysius Parker in the iconic 1960s series 'Thunderbirds'. Additionally, Graham voiced the mutant Daleks in 'Doctor Who' during the 1960s and 70s. The creator of 'Thunderbirds', Gerry Anderson, shared a heartfelt tribute on social media following Graham's passing. *—ANI*

Depp honoured with Lifetime Achievement Award

LOS ANGELES, 21 SEPT

Hollywood star Johnny Depp will be honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 19th Rome Film Festival, where his upcoming directorial "Modi - Three Days on the Wing of Madness" will also be screened. According to entertainment news outlet Deadline, the film will head to Rome after its world premiere at the San Sebastian Film Festival later this month. The 2024 edition of the Rome Film Festival will take place from 16 to 27 October. Described as a "seventy-two-hour whirlwind in the life of bohemian artist Amedeo Modigliani", "Modi" features Riccardo Scamarcio in the lead role alongside Antonia Desplat and Hollywood icon Al Pacino. The film follows a chaotic series of events through the streets of war torn Paris in 1916. *—PTI*

Sri Lanka votes as Wickremesinghe seeks another term

Results are expected to be declared on Sunday

COLOMBO, 21 SEPT

Millions of Sri Lankans are casting their votes on Saturday in the crucial presidential election -- the island nation's first major electoral exercise since its worst economic meltdown in 2022.

The election will be a test for incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe who has claimed credit for putting the country on the road to recovery. Analysts said this election is the most keenly contested of all presidential elections since 1982 with 38 candidates in the fray.

Wickremesinghe, 75, is seeking re-election for a five-year term as an independent candidate, riding on the success of his efforts to pull the country out of the economic crisis, which many experts hailed as one of the quickest recoveries in the world.

As Sri Lanka sank into economic collapse in 2022, a popular uprising led its then-president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to flee the country.

Wickremesinghe was appointed as president by Parliament a week after Rajapaksa was chased out of power. Some 17 million people are eligible to vote at over 13,400 polling stations. Over 200,000 officials have been deployed to conduct the election which will be guarded by 63,000 police personnel.

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe along with his wife shows his ink-marked finger after casting their vote in Colombo *PHOTO: PTI*

Voting started at 7 am and will continue till 4 pm. Results are expected by Sunday. Buddhist Temple halls, schools and community centres have been converted into polling stations.

Officials estimated 30 per cent voter turnout by noon. The Police Elections Bureau said that voting was proceeding peacefully, with no reports of violence so far.

"At 4 pm, we will try to start postal vote counting and at 6 pm we would like to start normal counting. All the election management systems are okay...Within two or three hours (after the counting of votes starts), we can display the results," said Colombo City Deputy Election Commissioner MKSKK Bandaramapa.

Under Wickremesinghe, the rupee has stabilised, inflation has slowed to near zero from over 70 per cent during the peak of the economic crisis, economic growth has turned to positive from contraction, and government revenue has jumped sharply after new taxes and an increase in value added tax. *—PTI*

HUNDREDS INJURED

Death toll from Israeli strike on Beirut rises to 31

BEIRUT, 21 SEPT

Lebanon's health minister said Saturday that the death toll from an Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb the day before has risen to 31, including seven women and three children.

Firass Abiad told reporters that 68 people were also wounded of whom 15 remain in hospital, in the deadliest Israeli airstrike on Beirut since the summer 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

The death toll included Ibrahim Akil, a Hezbollah commander who was in charge of the group's elite Radwan Forces, as well as about a dozen members of the militant group who were meeting in the basement of the building that was destroyed. Three Syrian nationals were among the dead, Abiad said.

Late Friday, the Israeli military said the strike killed 11 Hezbollah operatives, including Akil. Israel launched the rare airstrike in the densely populated southern Beirut neighbourhood on Friday afternoon during rush hour as people returned home from work and students from schools.

Lebanese troops cordoned off the area preventing people from reaching the building that was knocked down as members of the Lebanese Red Cross stood nearby to take any recovered body from under the rubble.

Friday's deadly strike came hours after Hezbollah launched one of its most intense bombardments of northern Israel in nearly a year of fighting, largely targeting Israeli military sites. Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system intercepted most of the Katyusha rockets. Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire regularly since Hamas' 7 October assault on southern Israel ignited the Israeli military's devastating offensive in Gaza. *—AP*

Emergency workers use excavators to clear the rubble at the site of Friday's Israeli strike in Beirut on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

Weaponising ordinary devices violates int'l law: UN rights chief

UNITED NATIONS, 21 SEPT

Weaponising ordinary communication devices represents a new development in warfare, and targeting thousands of Lebanese people using pagers, two-way radios and electronic equipment without their knowledge is a violation of international human rights law, the United Nations human rights chief said Friday. Volker Turk told an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council there must be an independent and transparent investigation of the two attacks in Lebanon on Tuesday and Wednesday where these devices exploded, reportedly killing 37 people and injuring more than 3,400 others. *—AP*

At least 12 rivers in Ishikawa breached their banks *PHOTO: X@thetimespatriot*

Heavy rain pounds northcentral Japan

TOKYO, 21 SEPT

- Japan issued the highest level of heavy rain across several cities in the Ishikawa prefecture, including the worst-hit Wajima where authorities said one person was missing

Heavy rain pounded Japan's northcentral region of Noto on Saturday which triggered landslides and swollen rivers to overflow, flooding homes and stranding some residents in the region still recovering from a deadly earthquake earlier this year.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued the highest level of heavy rain across several cities in the Ishikawa prefecture, including the worst-hit Wajima where authorities said one person was missing.

At least 12 rivers in Ishikawa breached their banks as of late Saturday morning, according to the Land and Infrastructure Ministry. Residents were urged to use maximum caution against possible mudslides and building damage.

Up to 20 centimetres (7.8 inches) of rainfall is predicted in the region within the next 24 hours through Sunday noon, due to the rainbands that cause torrential rain above the Hokuriku region, JMA said.

So far, there have been no reports of injuries from the heavy rain. But many homes were flooded and some residents in two districts in Wajima have been stranded following landslides, according to the prefecture. A number of roads flooded by muddy water were also blocked. Hokuriku Electric Power Co. said about 6,500 homes was without power.

A 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck the region on Jan. 1, killing more than 370 people and damaging roads and other key infrastructure. Its aftermath still affects the local industry, economy and daily lives. *—AP*

Trump returns to N Carolina without top in-state supporters

WILMINGTON, 21 SEPT

Donald Trump returns to North Carolina on Saturday, stumping in the southern battleground state that both Democrats and Republicans are treating as increasingly critical to victory in November.

But Trump will be campaigning in Wilmington, along the state's southern coast, without Lt Gov Mark Robinson, the GOP gubernatorial nominee and one of the former president's top surrogates in the state, following a CNN report about his alleged posts on a pornography website's message board. Two people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity said Friday that Robinson was not scheduled to attend the Wilmington event.

Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

Robinson has denied writing the posts, which include lewd and racist comments, saying Thursday that he wouldn't be forced out of the race by "salacious tabloid lies." Trump's campaign has appeared to distance itself from Robinson in the wake of the CNN reporting, which the AP has not independently verified, saying in statement to the AP that Trump "is focused on winning the White House and saving this country" and calling North Carolina "a vital part of that plan," without mentioning Robinson.

While Robinson won his GOP gubernatorial primary in March, he's been trailing in several recent polls to Democratic nominee Josh Stein, the state's attorney general. State Republican officials have stood by Robinson, whose decision to keep campaigning could threaten GOP prospects in other key races, including Trump's efforts in a battleground state he previously won twice.

Trump won there in both his previous campaigns but by less than 1.5 percentage points over Democrat Joe Biden in 2020, the closest margin of any state that Trump won. That's part of why Democrats see the state as winnable this fall. *—AP*

TENNESSEE: JUDGE BLOCKS 'ABORTION TRAFFICKING' LAW

NASHVILLE, 21 SEPT

A federal judge on Friday temporarily blocked Tennessee from enforcing a law banning adults from helping minors get an abortion without parental permission.

US District Judge Aleta Trauger argued that the Republican-controlled state cannot "make it a crime to communicate freely" about legal abortion options even in a state where abortion is banned at all stages of pregnancy except for a handful of situations. Tennessee's Republican lawmakers and GOP Gov Bill Lee signed off on a proposal making it illegal for an adult who "intentionally recruits, harbors, or transports" a pregnant child or teen within the state to get an abortion without consent. *—AP*

Russian attacks against Ukraine kill 8, injure 53

KYIV, 21 SEPT

Russian attacks against Ukraine killed eight people, including a 12-year-old boy, and wounded another 53 in the past day, regional authorities reported on 21 September.

Russian attacks against the city of Kharkiv and three regional settlements killed two people and injured 21 more, Kharkiv Oblast Governor Oleh Syniehubov reported. The attacks damaged houses, a market, a hospital, a hotel, warehouses and other buildings, according to Syniehubov.

Thirteen people suffered injuries when Russia hit multiple settlements in Donetsk Oblast, engulfed in intense fighting, Governor Vadym Filashkin said on Facebook. Russian attacks against Donetsk Oblast destroyed or damaged almost 40 houses, nine apartment buildings, an infrastructure facility, an enterprise, an administrative building, shops, and energy infrastructure, according to Filashkin.

Three people were killed, including a 12-year-old boy, and another three were injured, including a teenage boy, in a Russian missile attack on Kryvyi Rih overnight, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Governor Serhii Lysak said on Telegram.

PHOTO: PTI

Over 20 houses, three apartment buildings, an educational facility, a school, and an enterprise were reportedly damaged in the attacks on Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Russian forces targeted multiple settlements in Sumy Oblast, killing a civilian and wounding another two, the regional administration said on social media.

Artillery, drones, mortars, guided aerial bombs, and multiple-launch rocket systems were reportedly used to attack Sumy Oblast over the past day. Russian strikes against the city of Kherson and 23 regional settlements killed two people and wounded another seven, Kherson Oblast Governor Oleksandr Prokudin reported.

Prokudin added that an apartment building, 23 houses, and agricultural equipment were damaged in Kherson Oblast. *—Courtesy, Kyiv Independent*

SEX TRAFFICKING TRIAL

Sean Diddy is in jail on suicide watch

WASHINGTON, 21 SEPT

Jailers put accused sex trafficker Sean "Diddy" Combs on a "procedural" suicide watch, as the music mogul awaits trial on three felony counts tied to more than a decade of alleged abuse, a source said.

Combs has been in federal custody in New York City since Monday night and guards at the Metropolitan Detention Center are closely monitoring him, a source familiar with the situation told NBC News.

The source described this suicide watch as "procedural with high profile clients." Combs "remains strong and focused on his defence," the source added. A spokesperson for Combs said, "Combs is strong, healthy, and focused on his defense. He is committed to fighting this case and has full confidence in both his legal team and the truth."

Sean Diddy *PHOTO: X@NBCNEWS.COM*

A judge on Wednesday denied Combs' appeal for bail, but his defense lawyers are considering additional court action in hopes of freeing their client before trial. Combs, 54, faces a three-count felony indictment, accusing him of racketeering, sex trafficking and transportation to engage in prostitution in acts that date as far back as 2008.

Prosecutors accused the famed rapper of using his money and power to arrange for degrading, and at times physically abusive, sex acts called "freak offs." Federal agents claimed they seized more than 1,000 bottles of baby oil and other lubricants from Combs' homes that were used in these sex acts.

Combs was arrested late Monday in a Manhattan hotel, roughly six months after federal authorities raided his luxurious homes in Los Angeles and Miami and revealed they were conducting a sex trafficking investigation.

During the searches, law enforcement seized narcotics, videos of the "Freak Offs" and more than 1,000 bottles of baby oil and lubricant, according to prosecutors. They said agents also seized firearms and ammunition, including three AR-15s with defaced serial numbers. *—CNN/AP*

'Parl can't backdate laws if they affect people's rights'

ISLAMABAD, 21 SEPT

In a blow to the Pakistan government, the Supreme Court ruled that national or provincial assemblies cannot make prospective or retrospective laws which are against fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution.

The observations from Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah come within days after Speaker National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq sent a letter to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to retrospectively implement a change made by Parliament in the elections laws to restrict independently elected lawmakers from joining any political party.

Justice Shah was heading a three-judge bench, which heard a set of appeals challenging the amendments made in 2019 to Section 65B of the Income Tax Ordinance (ITO), 2001. Dawn newspaper reported that Justice Shah in the judgement wrote that Article 8 of the Constitution restricted the legislative powers of parliament and provincial assemblies by stopping them from making any law that affects the constitutional rights of people.

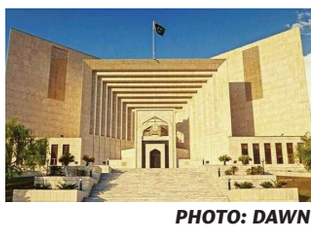

PHOTO: DAWN

Neither parliament nor the provincial assemblies could exercise their legislative powers in a manner prohibited by this article. Justice Shah said that prohibition also applies equally to both prospective and retrospective laws. *—PTI*

Horticulture production falls slightly in 2023-24

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

The country's horticulture production is estimated to fall marginally by 0.65 per cent to 353.19 million tonne in 2023-24 as compared to the previous year, according to the government's third advance estimate released on Saturday. Fruit production is expected to increase by 2.29 per cent to 112.73 million tonne in 2023-24 (July-June), driven by higher outputs of mango, banana, lime/lemon, grapes, and custard apple. However, production of apple, citrus fruits, guava, litchi, pomegranate, and pineapple is likely to fall, the agriculture ministry said. Vegetable production is projected at 205.80 million tonne, with increase in tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, and several other vegetables offsetting decline in staples like potatoes and onion, it said. *—PTI*

GM recalls at least 4,49,000 SUVs, pickups in US

NEW YORK, 21 SEPT

General Motors is recalling more than 4,49,000 of its SUVs and pickup trucks because the electronic brake control module software may fail to display a warning light when a loss of brake fluid takes place. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Friday that the recall includes certain 2023-2024 Cadillac Escalade and Escalade ESVs, 2023 Chevrolet Silverado 1500, 2023-2024 Chevrolet Tahoe and Suburban 1500, 2023 GMC Sierra 1500, 2023-2024 GMC Yukon and Yukon XL models. The agency said that without the warning light, a vehicle may be driven with low brake fluid, which can reduce braking performance and increase the risk of a crash. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Housing supply in Delhi-NCR triples in Sept to 13,311 units

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Fresh supply of residential properties in Delhi-NCR is estimated to triple during July-September to over 13,300 units as developers look to encash strong demand, according to PropEquity. Real estate data analytics firm PropEquity has estimated new launches of housing properties at 13,311 units in the current quarter as against 4,147 units in the year-ago period. Housing sales in Delhi-NCR are likely to increase 22 per cent during July-September 2024 to 10,263 units from 8,411 units in the corresponding period of the previous year. Rise in fresh supply of homes was one of the major factors for an increase in sales in Delhi-NCR market, besides strong consumer demand. Overall across nine major cities, PropEquity data shows that new launches in July-September 2024 may fall to 93,693 units from 1,05,655 units in the same period last year. *—PTI*

Global Startup Summit 2024 to start from 28 Sept

HYDERABAD, 28 SEPT

The 8th edition of the Global Startup Summit, co-powered by Dashback, is set to make a big impact on the startup ecosystem. Happening on 28 September, the event will bring together top investors, financiers, and experts for a 9-hour session. The event will focus on key areas including Startup & Investors Networking, PropTech, HealthTech, D2C and SAAS. It will feature specialized panels such as the Asia PropTech Forum, HealthTech Summit, Bharat Technology Conclave, and the International D2C Conclave. These groups will engage in in-depth discussions relevant to their fields, offering a platform for sharing knowledge and strategies. Attendees can look forward to learning from leading experts but also exploring opportunities for support and collaboration. *—PTI*

OYO buys US hotel chain Motel 6 brand for $525M

G6 Hospitality has nearly 1,500 economy lodging locations

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

IPO-bound travel tech platform OYO on Saturday announced it has agreed to acquire iconic American budget hotel chain Motel 6 and Studio 6 brands from Blackstone Real Estate for USD 525 million in an all-cash transaction, as the Indian unicorn eyes expansion in the US.

Oravel Stays, the parent company of OYO stated that it has agreed to acquire G6 Hospitality, the leading economy lodging franchisor and parent company of Motel 6 and the chain's offshoot hotel brand, Studio 6.

The transaction is expected to close in the fourth quarter of 2024, subject to customary closing conditions. Motel 6's franchise network produces gross room revenues of USD 1.7 billion, which generates a strong fee base and cash flow for G6.

OYO will leverage its comprehensive technology suite as well as its global distribution network and marketing expertise to further strengthen the Motel 6 and Studio 6 brands and drive continued financial growth, it stated.

The transaction is expected to close in the fourth quarter PHOTO: OYO

The travel tech platform has steadily expanded its footprint in the US since its launch in the region in 2019 and operates over 320 hotels across 35 states. In 2023, OYO added nearly 100 hotels to its US portfolio and aims to add about 250 hotels in 2024.

Under its ownership, Blackstone invested significant capital to create value and enhance the Motel 6 brand, including executing a strategy to transform the business into a leading asset light lodging company with a franchise network of close to 1,500 hotels across the US and Canada.

Julie Arrowsmith, Chief Executive Officer at G6 Hospitality said, "OYO's innovative approach to hospitality will allow us to enhance our offerings and great value to our guests while maintaining the iconic Motel 6 brand that travellers have trusted for over six decades."

Rob Harper, Head of Blackstone Real Estate Asset Management Americas, said, this transaction is a terrific outcome for investors and is the culmination of an ambitious business plan that more than tripled investors' capital and generated over USD 1 billion in profit over the hold period. Goldman Sachs & Co. LLC acted as Blackstone's lead advisor and Jones Lang LaSalle Securities, LLC and PJT Partners acted as financial advisors. Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP served as Blackstone's legal advisor. *—PTI*

BEAT CHINA AND US

India can become $10 tn economy by 2032: Report

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Indian economy to add USD 1 trillion to its GDP every 1.5 years over the next six years, according to a report by IDBI Capital.

The report highlighted that India is on the verge of a major transformation, aiming to become a USD 10 trillion economy by 2032, positioning itself as the third-largest economy globally by 2030. "By adding USD 1tn every 1.5 years going forward, India is forecasted to emerge as the third-largest global economy over the next six years," said the report.

The report noted that this accelerated growth will be driven largely by the manufacturing sector, which is expected to contribute 32 per cent to the incremental Gross Value Added (GVA).

It also highlighted the role of initiatives like "Make in India," which as per the report are designed to strengthen India's manufacturing base and transform the country into a global manufacturing hub.

The data also highlighted that India took 63 years, from 1947 to 2010, to reach a GDP of USD 1 trillion. However, growth has significantly accelerated in the past decade. India reached USD 2 trillion in 2017, just seven years later, and USD 3 trillion in 2020.

While, as per the report, the Covid-19 pandemic slowed growth slightly, extending the timeframe to USD 4 trillion by year end of 2024, the country is now set to see exponential growth in the coming years.

"India to overtake top 5 economies in manufacturing IIP ...US, China, Germany, South Korea and Japan... India has the potential to grow on similar lines supported by policy reforms and favourable business climate," the report added. It added India's increasing export potential, with exports estimated to account for 25 per cent of GDP by 2030, reaching USD 2 trillion. *—ANI*

'Centre to support waste recycling start-ups'

MUMBAI, 21 SEPT

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Saturday said the Centre will provide financial support to the waste recycling start-ups, and also focus on saving energy and water along with banning single-use plastic.

The minister was speaking after taking part in a Beach Cleanup Campaign at the Juhu beach here as part of the International Coastal Cleanup Day.

"The central government will support start-ups for recycling. My ministry has given guidelines for one-time financial support to such start-ups," he said.

"We know how to use nature's products, but forget to recycle them and litter on beaches and roads. Our focus will be on saving energy, water, banning single-use plastic and stopping wastage of food, promoting healthy lifestyle and e-waste disposal," Yadav said. The economy of several countries is tourism-based, he noted. The cleanliness drive launched on September 17 at Girgaum Chowpatty in south Mumbai will continue till 2 October, he said. Talking to reporters later, CM Shinde said awareness regarding cleanliness has grown ever since the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. *—PTI*

Bhupender Yadav PHOTO: PTI

Leela Hotels owner Schloss files for ₹5K cr IPO

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Schloss Bangalore, an operator of luxury hotels and resorts under the renowned Leela brand, is all set to make an entry into the Indian capital markets. The company filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on September 20, 2024, to raise Rs 5,000 crore through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The luxury hospitality chain plans to utilise the funds primarily for debt repayment and general corporate purposes The Schloss Bangalore IPO will raise Rs 3,000 crore through a fresh issue of shares, while Rs 2,000 crore will be generated via an offer-for-sale (OFS) by its promoter, Project Ballet Bangalore Holdings (DIFC). The latter is an institutionally owned entity and the sole promoter offering shares in this OFS. Additionally, the company may consider a pre-IPO placement of Rs 600 crore via a preferential offer. Should this placement occur, the fresh issue size would be reduced accordingly before the company files its Red Herring Prospectus with the Registrar of Companies (ROC) or officially launches the IPO for public subscription. Utilising IPO Proceeds Schloss Bangalore, which operates a chain of high-end hotels and resorts under the Leela brand, has outlined its intended use for the IPO proceeds. A significant portion-Rs 2,700 crore from the fresh issue-will be allocated towards repaying debt, both at the parent company and its subsidiaries.

The company's consolidated debt stood at Rs 4,052.5 crore as of May 2024. *—Agencies*

The company filed its DRHP with the SEBI PHOTO: PTI

- The Schloss Bangalore IPO will raise Rs 3,000 crore through a fresh issue of shares, while Rs 2,000 crore will be generated via OFS and DIFC

PROMOTING INVESTMENTS

Goyal all for addressing local industry's concerns

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

India on Friday called for addressing the concerns of its domestic industries affected by the existing free trade agreement (FTA) with the 10-nation bloc ASEAN as the two regions negotiate a review of the pact.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has also emphasized the need to rectify the inequitable tariff liberalization under the agreement. Goyal said this during the stock-taking exercise of the progress of review talks for the India-ASEAN free trade agreement in goods (AITIGA) in Laos.

All the ministers took note of the progress in negotiations for the review of the agreement.

"Minister Goyal in his intervention stressed the need for addressing injury to industries from the existing FTA and the inequitable tariff liberalisation during the review. He also cited India's ongoing efforts of integrating with other economies through FTAs and highlighted the urgency in upgrading AITIGA which otherwise may lead to diversion of bilateral trade to other regions," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

The economic ministers or their representatives from all the 10 ASEAN countries - Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam participated in the meeting. It said that the ministers reiterated the commitment to ensure that the outcome of the review should be mutually beneficial and commercially meaningful and will make the AITIGA more effective, user-friendly, simple, and trade facilitative for businesses.

The review of the agreement is a long-standing demand of Indian industry and India is looking forward to an upgraded pact which will address the current asymmetries in bilateral trade and will make trade more balanced and sustainable. *—PTI*

India and South Korea discuss upgrading existing trade pact

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

India and Korea on Saturday held discussions on upgrading the existing free trade agreement, balancing two-way commerce and promoting investments between the two countries.

The issues were discussed during a meeting between Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and his Korean counterpart Inkyo Cheong at Vientiane, Laos.

"Deliberations were held on achieving more balanced trade, upgrading the India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), promoting investments linked to job creation and addressing non-tariff barriers to further strengthen our economic ties," Goyal said in a post on social media platform X.

Department of Commerce had earlier engaged with different ministries, including heavy industries, steel, and chemicals, to prepare the offer list. India has sought greater market access for certain products like steel, rice, and shrimp from South Korea to boost exports of these goods. India has flagged issues over Korean firms not buying Indian steel.

India has also raised concerns about the growing trade deficit between the two countries. India's exports to Korea dipped to USD 6.41 billion in 2023-24 from USD 6.65 billion in 2022-23 and USD 8 billion in 2021-22. The imports stood at USD 21.13 billion in the last fiscal as against USD 21.22 billion in 2022-23 and USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22. *—PTI*

Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea Inkyo Cheong greets Union Minister Piyush Goyal in Laos on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

- India raised concerns about the growing trade deficit between the two countries. India's exports to Korea dipped to $6.41B in 2023-24 from $6.65 billion in 2022-23

VANGUARD BUYS SHARES OF 7 FIRMS WORTH ₹998 CR

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

US-based financial services company Vanguard Group on Friday bought shares of seven companies including Concord Biotech, Five-Star Business Finance and Marksans Pharma for Rs 998 crore through open market transactions.

Vanguard through its affiliates acquired shares of seven companies through separate bulk deals on the National Stock Exchange (NSE). Vanguard picked up shares of Concord Biotech worth Rs 331 crore, acquired shares of Five-Star Business Finance for Rs 304.74 crore, purchased Marksans Pharma shares for Rs 158.39 crore and bought Genus Power Infrastructure shares for Rs 63.26 crore. In addition, Vanguard also acquired Sansera Engineering shares for Rs 53 crore, purchased shares of VA Tech Wabag for about Rs 47 crore and picked up Arvind Fashions' shares for Rs 39.56 crore, as per the data on the NSE. Meanwhile, Zurich-based financial services company UBS Group AG offloaded shares. *—PTI*

MICROSOFT BREAKS OS BARRIER:

Windows app now available on all platforms

WASHINGTON, 21 SEPT

Microsoft has officially launched a new Windows app designed for a variety of platforms, including macOS, iOS, iPadOS, Android, and Windows PCs.

This innovative application serves as a central hub for streaming Windows from multiple sources, such as Windows 365, Azure Virtual Desktop, and Remote Desktop, effectively unifying the experience for users across different devices, according to The Verge.

After nearly a year of testing, the new app reportedly includes features such as a customizable home screen, multi-monitor support, and USB redirection, allowing users to connect local devices--like webcams, storage devices, and printers--as if they were directly linked to a cloud PC.

This innovative application serves as a central hub for streaming Windows from multiple sources PHOTO: PEXELS

This functionality enhances the versatility of remote work and streamlines the user experience.

However, the app is currently limited to Microsoft work and school accounts, primarily targeting existing users of Remote Desktop clients.

It reportedly aims to facilitate a smoother transition for these users to the new platform. Microsoft has offered similar remote access applications for years, including the Remote Desktop Connection tool that remains part of Windows 11.

Despite the app's robust features, there are currently no indications that Microsoft intends to support consumer accounts, as per The Verge. Last year, the company disclosed its long-term vision of transitioning Windows entirely to a cloud-based model to enhance AI-powered services and allow users greater flexibility in their digital experiences. The Verge reported that users can download the new Windows app from the Microsoft Store, while macOS, iOS, and iPadOS versions are available via Apple's App Store. *—ANI*

Educators to procure 1,000 AI-backed ed-tech innovations

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Indian educators will procure more than 1,000 AI-Powered EdTech innovations showcased at Didac India 2024 exhibition, according to a statement. The 14th edition of Didac India, an exhibition and conference focused on education and skilling resources, was organised by Messe Stuttgart India from September 18 to 20 at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi. The event witnessed the unveiling of a diverse array of futuristic solutions and resources with exhibitors from over 20 countries showcasing more than 5,000 Edtech products and innovations, the statement said.

"Over 1000 cutting-edge AI products are going to be procured by Indian educators to transform India's education and skill sector," it stated. Companies including Roombr, Microsoft, HP, Samsung, LG, BenQ, Up Grad, Teachmint, Viewsonic, Philips, and several others showcased latest innovations in AI, education technologies, drones, educational supplies, IoT, robotics, AV equipment, lab equipment, infrastructure, AR, and VR and more.

International pavilions from Germany, Australia, Finland, the UK, Japan, and Singapore, among others, showcased the latest technology. Roombr unveiled the Roombr Digital Classroom, the world's first patented digital classroom solution. The world's largest educational robotics company Vex Robotics has introduced two new products: VEX EXP, a metallic robot designed for classroom use, and VEX IQ, a robot tailored for elementary and middle school students. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/@JamshedpurFC

Jamshedpur FC eke out 3-2 fighting win over Mumbai

Jamshedpur, 21 Sept Spaniard Javi Hernandez struck a brace as Jamshedpur FC eked out a hard-fought 3-2 win over Mumbai City FC after falling a goal behind to secure their first home victory of the Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25 season here on Saturday. Hernandez scored in the 44th and 50th minutes while Jordan Murray (36th minute) got the other goal for the home side at the JRD Tata Sports Complex. In the process, Hernandez became the third player in the ISL to score for five different clubs. Nikolaos Karelis (18th) and Yoell van Nieff (77th) found the target for Mumbai City Mumbai City FC started the game on a dominating note. In the fifth minute, they got their first opportunity when Yoell van Nieff snatched the ball from Javi Hernandez and glanced an attempt from distance. His shot took a curl but went inches wide. *—PTI*

Gurbaz, Rashid lead Afg to 1st ODI series win over SA

SHARJAH, 21 SEPT

Afghanistan won a one-day international series against South Africa for the first time on Friday with a game to spare. The thumping 177-run victory — Afghanistan's biggest in ODIs by runs — came just two days after Afghanistan beat South Africa for the first time. Also, Rahmanullah Gurbaz's 105 made him the first Afghan man to hit seven ODI hundreds. Their strong total of 311-4 in sweltering heat was followed by South Africa being all out for 134 in the 35th over. Afghanistan will eye a series sweep in the final ODI on Sunday. Leg-spinner Rashid Khan, who injured his hamstring while batting, celebrated his 26th birthday with 5-19 and left-arm spinner Nangeyalia Kharote claimed 4-26. *—AP*

Kalikesh Singh Deo elected NRAI President

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo was elected president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he beat his rival VK Dhall 36-21 in the polls held at the Constitution Club of India here on Saturday. Kalikesh, a former MP from Odisha, was taking care of the day-to-day functioning of the NRAI after the position fell vacant last year following the resignation of Raninder Singh as per the government's National Sports Code (NSC). Last year, the Sports Ministry had issued a directive that heads of national sports federations (NSFs) cannot hold office for more than 12 years as per the NSC. The ministry had pointed out in March 2023 that Raninder had completed 12 years as president — from Dec 29, 2010 to Dec 29, 2022 — and as per the code, he cannot continue any further. *—PTI*

Haddad advances to semis of WTA's Korea Open

SEOUL, 21 SEPT

Beatriz Haddad Maia advanced to the rain-delayed semifinals of the Korea Open with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Polina Kudermetova on Saturday. Haddad Maia was the 2017 runner-up in the Seoul WTA 500-level tournament. Persistent rain showers washed out all play Friday, forcing the quarterfinals and semifinals to be played on Saturday. The 21-year Kudermetova played Haddad Maia on Centre Court at the same time her sister Veronika Kudermetova, who is 27 and ranked 25th, was taking on Viktoriya Tomova on the Grandstand Court. The elder Kudermetova had a better result for the family, with Veronika beating Tomova 7-5, 6-3. *—AP*

Pant and Gill put India in command with hundreds

Bangladesh 158 for 4 in chase of 515 as bad light stops play

CHENNAI, 21 SEPT

Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill cleansed months of hurt, anxiety and disappointments of varying nature with emotional hundreds on the third day to place India in a prime position to win the first Test against Bangladesh here Saturday.

Gill (119 not out) and Pant (109 led the hosts' run glut with an alliance of 167 for the fourth wicket that helped India, overnight 81/3, declare their second innings at 287 for 4 for an overall lead of 514. Bangladesh showed some spunk in their second innings to reach 158 for four when play was called off at 4.25 pm due to bad light. They still need a whopping 357 runs for the result to be in their favour.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (51) and Shakib Al-Hasan (5) were manning the crease for the visitors, and the day could have ended on a better note for them have they been a slightly more judicious in shot selection against star off-spinner R Ashwin (3/63). But let's forget the match situation and those dreary numbers for a while to cast a deeper look into the story of the day.

The hundreds by Pant and Gill stood as a testimony of these two fine young men's will to rise above towering personal obstacles that would have strangled the ordinary.

Pant stood near the middle of the pitch with closed eyes, an upward tilted head and a raised bat – offering a silent prayer, perhaps, to the Lord above for returning life and cricket to him.

Gill watched the whole scene from a fair distance, as he did not want to invade into an intensely private moment of his partner.

Compared to Pant's, the struggles of Gill have been less pronounced as they were more mental than physical in nature, stemming primarily from the lack of confidence in himself in the traditional format. However, since making that hundred against England at Visakhapatnam earlier this year, Gill seemed to have turned a corner and he further validated that journey upwards with his fifth Test hundred, fetched through a single off Mehidy Hasan Miraz. *—PTI*

Indian players leave the ground after play stopped due to bad light on the third day of the first test cricket match between India and Bangladesh, at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, in Chennai on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

DAY 3 STUMPS

INDIA	Bangladesh need	BANGLADESH
376*	357 runs to win	149
287/4 declared		158/4

* Runs

SINGAPORE GP

Norris sets new lap record during final practice

SINGAPORE, 21 SEPT

Lando Norris set the pace during the third and final practice session ahead of the Singapore Grand Prix, the McLaren man going fastest by nearly half a second from closest challenger George Russell while Ferrari's pace seemed to have slipped. After Friday's practice sessions saw Charles Leclerc and Norris rule the top of the timesheets – with very fine margins between the two – questions remained over whether anybody could take the challenge to the pair as FP3 got under way at 1730 local time, offering a final chance to prepare for qualifying later in the evening.

Lizard on track halts Formula 1 practice

A large lizard scampered onto the track and stopped the third and final Formula 1 practice session for the Singapore Grand Prix on Saturday.

The session was briefly red-flagged after Aston Martin driver Fernando Alonso reported over the radio that he'd seen the lizard in the middle of the track. Two track marshals chased the long-tailed reptile and the session resumed shortly after. Title challenger Lando Norris of McLaren set the fastest time, while standings leader Max Verstappen was fourth-fastest and reported his Red Bull car felt better than it had during a difficult second practice session the day before. *—Courtesy, F1/ AP*

PRACTICE 3 RESULTS

LANDO NORRIS
(McLaren): 1:29.646

MAX VERSTAPPEN
(Red Bull Racing): +0.894s

CHARLES LECLERC
(Ferrari): +0.913s

Lando Norris set the pace during the third and final practice session ahead of the Singapore Grand Prix *PHOTO: X@PITPASSDOTCOM*

Ronaldo's goal helps give Pioli debut win

RIYADH, 21 SEPT

Cristiano Ronaldo opened the scoring as Al-Nassr defeated Ettifaq 3-0 and gave Stefano Pioli victory in his first game as coach of the Saudi Arabian club on Friday.

The Italian, who led AC Milan to the Serie A title in 2022, was appointed on Wednesday to succeed Luis Castro. The Portuguese coach was dismissed the previous day due to Al-Nassr's slow start to the season with just one win in three Saudi Pro League games. Ronaldo, who missed Al-Nassr's 1-1 draw in the AFC Champions League Elite with Al-Shorta of Iraq on Monday due to a viral infection, fired home from the penalty spot after 33 minutes for his third goal of the season.

In the second half, Salem Al-Najdi and Anderson Talisca added to the scoreline. The defeat was the first this season for Ettifaq but the team coached by Steven Gerrard stayed third. Al-Nassr moved to fourth.

Al-Ahli was in fifth after two goals from Ivan Toney helped the Jeddah club beat Damac 4-2. Toney, signed from English Premier League club Brentford in August, made the opener for Gabri Veiga before scoring his first goals since the move to Saudi.

Former Liverpool forward Roberto Firmino scored the other. Al-Hilal and Al-Ittihad are first and second in the standings and meet on Saturday. *—AP*

Cristiano Ronaldo *PHOTO: X*

FY 2024-2025

Matches:	Goals:	Assist:
4	3	1

Career total goals: 902

Chess: Vantika helps Indian draw with US

BUDAPEST, 21 SEPT

International Master Vantika Agrawal delivered the goods when it was badly needed, defeating Grandmaster Irina Krush to force a 2-2 draw against the United States while the Indian men stayed in sole lead after splitting points with Uzbekistan in the ninth round of the of the 45th Chess Olympiad currently underway here.

The Indian think-tank rested an out-of-form Grandmaster D Harika but it did not change the fortunes on the top board as R Vaishali went down to Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova. On the second board, Divya Deshmukh settled for the peace result in an uneventful game with black against Carissa Yip.

On the fourth board, Tania Sachdev had almost everything going in her favour but could not find the knock-out blow when the opportunity came to share the point with Alice Lee. It was left to Vantika to equalise the score and the young girl played with a lot of heart and commitment to beat her higher-rated opponent. For the record, Krush blundered in mutual time pressure and Vantika was remorseless in her attack.

The draw took India to 15 points, and they will now probably need two victories in the last two rounds to keep the gold medal chances alive. Kazakhstan emerged as the new sole leader in this section on 16 points, defeating Poland 2.5-1.5. Alua Nurman played the star performer for Kazakh women as she won on the fourth board against Alicja Sliwicka after the top three boards had ended in draws.

In the Open section, the Indian men conceded the first point with four draws against defending champions Uzbekistan. After eight straight victories, the ninth win, which would have almost sealed the gold medal, was pretty much on the cards when Arjun Erigaisi's opponent Shamsiddin Vokhidov blundered. It was a mutual oversight by both players as Arjun failed to spot a tactic which he would have normally found in a few seconds.

The Sicilian defense did not yield the usual complications and the game petered out into a draw in just 32 moves vide repetition. *—PTI*

Vantika Agrawal during the match against Irina Krush on Saturday *PHOTO: X@CHESSCOM_IN*

3 Indians make cut at La Sella Open, 1 loses out

DENIA, 21 SEPT

Three Indians -- Ridhima Dilawari, Pranavi Urs and and Tvesa Malik -- made the halfway cut, while Seher Atwal missed out by just one shot after Round 2 at the La Sella Open here.

The cut fell at level par with 62 players making it through to the final two days. Ridhima (70-71) was tied-15th, while Pranavi (72-71) and Tvesa (70-74) were T-34th and T-52nd respectively. Seher missed out after rounds of 72 and 73.

Ridhima, who started from the 10th, dropped a shot on the 13th, but quickly made up with birdies on the 14th and the 18th to turn in 1-under. A bogey on the first pegged her back, but she birdied the fifth, dropped a shot on the seventh and closed with a birdie for a 1-under 71. Pranavi had four birdies against three bogeys in her 71 and ensured the weekend rounds.

Tvesa had to fight hard as she had one eagle, one birdie and five bogeys in a round of 74 as she squeezed inside the cut-line. Kirsten Rudgeley, Sara Kouskova and Virginia Elena Carta are tied for the lead at the halfway mark, with all three ending day 2 on seven-under par.

Australia's Rudgeley followed up her first round of 68 (-4) with a 69 (-3), which included six birdies and three bogeys.

The 27-year-old had only one dropped shot on the 13th but rolled in birdies on the fifth, sixth and 16th holes to be tied at the top after two days. *—PTI*

Ridhima Dilawari, Pranavi Urs and and Tvesa Malik *PHOTO: AGENCIES*

SHUBHANKAR MISSES CUT AT WENTWORTH

WENTWORTH, 21 SEPT

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma ended a disappointing week early, missing the the cut at the BMW PGA Championship here.

Sharma had two birdies and three bogeys in a row in the middle of the round. He then birdied on the 12th followed by a bogey on the 15th for a second round of 74. He had shot 75 in the first round. Matthew Baldwin consolidated his strong start with a brilliant 66 to sit two shots clear after day two of the championship.

The Englishman was one of two players to keep a clean card on Thursday. *—PTI*

EYES ON BEST PLAYER

Harmanpreet bags FIH award nomination

NEW DELHI, 21 SEPT

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh, who powered India to a second successive bronze medal in hockey at the Olympics in Paris, was on Saturday nominated for the FIH Player of the Year Award.

The 28-year-old ace drag-flicker, who was the top scorer at the Paris Olympics with 10 goals from eight matches, had previously won the award twice in a row from 2020-22. "It is a great honour to be nominated for the FIH Player of the Year Award again," the Indian defender stated in a Hockey India release.

"While I am elated to be named among some of the best players in the world, I would like to acknowledge that it would not have been possible without the support of my team. "All the goals I have scored in the FIH Hockey Pro League, and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games are because the team created those goal-scoring chances for me," he added. Harmanpreet has been nominated along with the Dutch duo of Thierry Brinkman and Joep de Mol, Hannes Müller of Germany and Zach Wallace of England. All international matches held in 2024, including Test matches, the FIH Hockey Pro League, FIH Hockey Nations Cups, FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers and the Olympic Games were taken into consideration.

The calm and composed India captain scored seven of his 10 goals through penalty corners while the remaining three goals were penalty strokes. Harmanpreet described the Paris Olympics as the pinnacle of his career, expressing gratitude to his team for its unwavering support during challenging times, including his struggles with penalty corners in the previous World Cup. *—PTI*

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh as the top scorer at the Paris Olympics with 10 goals from eight matches *PHOTO: PTI*

Ricky Bhui inches towards hundred in Duleep Trophy

ANANTHAPUR, 21 SEPT

Ricky Bhui was 10 runs short of his second successive hundred as India D's overall lead swelled to 311 against India B, when stumps were drawn on the third day of the Duleep Trophy encounter here on Saturday.

Shreyas Iyer also showed some form with a purposeful half-century for India D, scoring 50 off 40 balls.

At stumps, India D scored 244 for 5 in their second innings with Bhui unbeaten on 90 off just 87 balls with 10 fours and three sixes to his credit. Earlier, India B were all out for 282 in their first innings in reply to 'D's first essay of 349.

Starting the day at 210 for 6, Washington Sundar (87) ran out of partners as none of the tail-enders stayed long enough to give him an opportunity to complete his hundred. Washington's 140-ball knock was studded with seven fours and a six. Left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar, who has been on the fringes for a long time finished with 5 for 73 while Arshdeep Singh couldn't add to his overnight tally of three victims.

Iyer was finally holed out by Mohit Avasthi off Mukesh Kumar, who took three wickets despite going for 80 runs in his 13 overs. He hit seven fours and a six. *—PTI*

Ricky Bhui leads India D's fight with gutsy hundred *PHOTO: PTI*